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ALL THE YEAR WITH NATURE

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BY

P. ANDERSON GRAHAM

LONDON

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W. E. HENLEY

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P. A. G.

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SPRING



BIRDS-NESTING

MY earliest memory of birds-nesting is that of having been lifted up, while yet wearing a pinafore, to see the sky-blue eggs of a hedge-sparrow that had built among the black hawthorns by the roadside. It was before their first grey buds had developed into green, or the violet had flowered at their roots. The cock bird sat on the top rail of a gate and girded at us fiercely in his thin little voice, and his mate fluttered uneasily to and fro along the fence. To this day 'Billy's' artless note is as welcome as the song of lark or nightingale. But a time soon came for rambling in search of others.

One favourite field (who does not remember the like?) was a true birds-nester's paradise. On the north it was sheltered by a strip of tall beech and ash. For two hundred yards of fresh grass there was a precipitous slope to a great hedge, at whose foot the

marsh marigolds 'shone like fire,' for water oozed through a swamp to a burn that chattered riverwards. A mighty trunk had lain there for years, whereon, if you sat motionless, you would presently see the creatures come forth unconcernedly among the primroses that bloomed near by. Towards dusk a hedgehog led forth her annual litter of prickly piglings, and a grey and ugly rat emerged from his hole. But pleasantest it was to watch the feathered builders at their work. Out and in from a little hole scarce large enough to take your finger hopped the blue titmouse, whose eggs could only be extracted by the artful use of a crooked stick: the mother hissed like a tiny snake when I 'clapped her in.' Where the falling earth had parted a bed of violets in two, and laid bare some twisting elm-roots, a shy yet impudent and cunning eident-looking robin is ever coming and going with morsels of hair and feather. The moist earth teems with slugs and snails, and by the heap of shells beside the big stone you know that here is a favourite feeding-place of thrush and blackbird. Their homes, too, are close at hand: the red-billed merle whistling in the hedge is calling his mate, who on an untidy home of wool, hair, and hay, is hatching her dirty-grey eggs in a bunch of cut thorn; while the mavis has his nest—compact, strong-walled, and well-lined—in the rough twigs low down on the wych elm's trunk. Late in the season, if you are patient—and patience is hardly a virtue when it only means smoking

a few pipes daily, and unconsciously assimilating the beauty of bright daisy-sprinkled grass, where the lambs are at frolic, and the budding trees and springing grass, the twitter of birds, and the brook's eternal song—you will see a brown bird come, his head thrown well back on his shoulders, and with the easy flight of a hawk, and till his joyous call floats out in the warm spring air you hardly realise that it is the first cuckoo. Every day he gets new companions, and you make a careful inventory of the homes on view in order to see what husbands are to be duped by this winged Lothario. In the crevice of the dry bank a water-wagtail, whose little flights and runs and flutterings on the close-cropped grass and among the cows and sheep have been part of the place's life, has made a warm, snug nest of moss and bent. One day you find added to the four speckled eggs already there another and a bigger one resembling (as they do) the house-sparrow's, but a size larger than these, and therefrom there issues a 'gowk' that grows at a pace bewildering to the putative parents. Many other happy households—the hedge-sparrow's, the lark's, the meadow-pipit's, even the blackbird's—invite the rascal's intrusion: but here he seems to take a peculiar joy in teasing the wagtail. In the wood on the hill there is another tiny home he loves to desecrate. It is built on the side of an ash-bole, and is most difficult to find. But the father, out of the very force of his loving anxiety, tells the seeker

when he is 'hot' or 'cold.' 'Tweet, tweet,' says the bold and handsome chaffinch in a low staccato while yet the enemy is afar. There must be a nest there, you think, and the surmise deepens into certainty as with eager eye but sauntering gait you come that way, and the bird's alarm shrills into a sharp 'Twink, twink,' loudening as you near, softening when you take up a wrong scent. At last you discern a bulge in the grey moss on the ash-tree; closely considered it is a cunningly devised and beautiful contrivance, so like the bark to which it is fastened that if your eye turns from it the search has to be made over again. The mother crouches as you look, and the cock darts round and round in a storm of twinkling shrieks. It is probably the cuckoo of most refined and cultivated tastes, the *précieux* of the tribe, that selects this charming household for his labours.

After all, however, this was only a kind of birds-nesting for girls: very pretty and interesting, no doubt, but not soul-satisfying, at any rate not to the mature schoolboy of ten or twelve, who made himself acquainted with the facts, indeed, but only by way of pleasing a cousin in petticoats or initiating a younger brother. He preferred something with a little more excitement. Away over the field are the towers of a ruined, ivy-grown castle, 'bosomed high in tufted trees.' It is on the other side of the river, and that is nine points in its favour. An aged ferryman would pilot one over for a copper; but no, that

method of crossing was disdained. Down below the curbing mill-dam the stream breaks away in laughing, rippling rushes over stone and pebble, and past gorse covert and bulrush and fern, and half the fun of birds-nesting in the ruins lay in fording the stream, and a goodly portion of the rest in coming back. It is not particularly easy to get from stepping-stone to stepping-stone with no other *impedimenta* than a pair of boots and stockings slung round your neck ; but if there are unblown starling's eggs in your cap, if there are young jackdaws noisily cawing in your pockets (and therewith perhaps a pair of featherless pigeons which must on no account be hurt), if one hand is taken up with a fuffing savage young owl, and if, besides, you are a little tired with the excitement and the toil of rifling these prizes from the lofty chambers and high-placed crannies of the ruin, it is by no means contemptible. Should dusk be come and the evening star be glittering in the pool, a nervous parent would sooner pay the ferryman in gold than see you attempt the feat. But when the birds come safely home—which they generally do unless there is a slip in mid-water, and callow nestlings and smashed eggs are borne merrily to seaward (often with the adventurer's loose clothing to keep them company)—then all's well that ends well, and the intelligent man is more interested in the addition to his boy's aviary than in thinking of perils which, however great and fearsome they were, are ' gone and dead and done.'

The Dene begins about a hundred paces from the door ; but none ever goes straight to it but girls after a basket of lilies or primroses, or mechanical egg-collectors. Those indeed who best love its slopes and shadowy recesses never go thither of set purpose at all, but are surprised to find themselves there after a wander in which their steps have been guided not by any determining will, but only as impulse ruled, or they were lured from field to field by a memory of things old, or the hope of something new. It is a soft, idle Spring morning, and you know not what it is that woos you forth—the oxeye darting in and out of his chink on the sunny garden wall, the ‘ full, sweet deep, loud and wild pipe ’ of the blackcap in the shrubbery, or the call of the turtle to his mate hid in the holly. But in the middle of the building season the very lanes are concert-rooms and nurseries in one. The highway is set with elms whose crevices have, from time immemorial, been peopled with starlings and jackdaws, that country folk think glossier of plumage than tenants of the crannied wall. Only a jackdaw of character and originality would dream of dividing from the crowding and chattering of his clan to settle in a lonely tree. And there can be no doubt of his wiliness. With what manifest unconcern he will sit on while a farm-cart rumbles by over the stones ! Yet let a couple of urchins intent on ‘ clapping him in ’ steal ever so softly across the grass to him, and long ere they are within shot his duskiness

emerges from the hole, flits swiftly round the trunk, and disappears through the leafage. And the young soon learn to be nearly as cunning as their elders. You can imagine them laughing at the stupid, groping hand which tears out a bushel of that mass of straw, hair, leather, paper, wool, rags, any and every sort of refuse, which the jackdaw calls a nest, yet goes empty away, they the while being ensconced in some inaccessible nook of the hollow trunk. The cushat above sits still and unnoticed on her eggs all through this operation, and it is watched from the ground by a little tomtit tucked up under a dome of hay woven round the stem of a thistle ; and not far off some other tiny mothers listen unseen to those voices they dread the most of all. Divided from the road by a dry ditch is a bank that in summer is one rich confusion of wild rose and bramble, foxglove and daisy and speedwell and fern. There, on a bed of moss and hair set in a tiny indentation, sits the sober mate to whom the yellow bunting, from his perch on rail or hedge-top, sings ever of ' a very, very little bit of bread and no cheese ; ' and sometimes her black-headed relative hatches her light-purple-spotted eggs hard by, having ' flitted ' thither from the green rushes and the rough grass of that marshy haugh which is her favoured haunt.

No boy could stop here ; for under a low single-arched bridge not far away the road is crossed by a stream, and in the pool made for passing horses and

cattle to drink at, there is an enormous trout—a trout at least four inches long!—which hitherto has foiled the rarest ‘guddler,’ with loaches under the stones, and young eels like living horse-hairs, and water-spiders with air-bubbles, and caddis-worms trailing their houses with them. Birds-nesting would be altogether forgotten but that an exploration of the archway—hardly bigger than a fox’s earth—discovers one of the most beautiful of bird’s houses, the spherical mansion of moss and lichen woven by the tiny ‘Kitty ma wren’ and perfectly harmonised with the ruining wall. She flits to and fro, cheeping with her thin voice in a superfluity of agitation, for her eight or nine white-and-pale-red-spotted eggs are safe from the rudest hands. Then it is natural to follow a burn, and we go tracing this one. At the meadow, where the fresh green spears of grass are warring with the brown ones of last summer, a heron slowly rises with a fish in his mouth and makes off to the great wood on the other bank of the river. What if his nest be there? True, the heronry is far away among the hills, in a plantation rising from the bank of a trout-stream; but here it is common enough for a stray couple to build on the highest oaks or the taller fir-trees. If you want to know why—*circumspice*! Not only is the brook well stocked with fry, but the river close at hand broadens over areas of yellow sand and gravel, and the rushing stream leaves scores of pools behind it, and there is no house within call, and

save for a wandering angler there is perfect solitude for the bird to take and enjoy his fish in. But many are the distractions that occur before the wood is reached. From a fork in one of the outermost trees of a spinney by the way a bird darts with the swiftness of an arrow. It's a sparrow-hawk, and he neither soars nor hangs in air. The pale, brown-marked eggs are left unbroken in the ancient crow's nest where they have been laid, but the place is marked for a return, for here in a few weeks will be pets worth having: always supposing, of course, that some fine morning the gamekeeper on his round does not add the parents' heads to the gruesome trophies—stoats, weasels, carrion-crows, and magpies—which are nailed to the wall of the kennel. But a discovery like that only whets one's appetite for the treasures across the river; and accordingly it is waded where a willow trunk has fallen athwart the deepest stream, and thereon you clamber, and so do you win to shore.

An inland boy knows no greater joy than that of rifling a heron's nest, and it is one not to be had once the suppleness of youth is passed. Up on the small branches at a tall tree-top perches a great bunch of sticks lined with wool; and, however difficult the ascent, it yields no thrill at all comparable to that you feel at the top. The slender boughs bend with your weight, as though at every moment you were to be launched into space; and if there be a breeze to sway you to and fro, you will have to hold on firmly

with foot and knee as well as with one hand while you try to take the angry, strong-billed, biting, beautiful-eyed fledglings with the other. And your nerves are not at all composed by the old birds either ; for, shrieking aloud and with open bills, they swoop past and past you till your cheeks feel the fanning of their wings, and you fear for your eyes. But if you are worth your salt, you do not give it up till you have flung down the quarry to be reared at home. If, as usually happens, there are four or five young ones in the nest, you leave the parents some that they may not be utterly disconsolate. But should there only be eggs, then these are left alone, for there is nothing against the hernsheugh, and in spite of what is often said to the contrary he is probably increasing and multiplying.

It is not every day, however, that a heron's nest is found, and but for this one your ramble would have inevitably ended in the Dene, which seems to have been created to be the grave of sunny afternoons. Even the old women who gather sticks for firewood there love it—they know not why—far better than any place besides, while all wild creatures for miles round make it their home, and its wild flowers are famous near and far. It is as if an enormous plough had cleft the soil, and made a furrow a hundred feet deep; every stone on the steep slopes of it circled by a summer procession of wild flowers. Wild hyacinths are gathered there and lilies of the valley, violets,

daffodils and primroses each in due season. At the bottom tinkles a little stream which sometimes vanishes under yards of rotting stick and leaf, yet has crumbled and worn away the earth from a world of twisted roots : a building-place of wren, and robin, and thrush. In the dry wall at the top the shy redstart breeds, and the green linnet nests in the hazels. At one end is a magnificent rookery, where innumerable voices incessantly caw, and gurgle, and call. Sometimes, after you have watched and listened, a rabbit crouching close at hand with affrighted eyes will start and rustle off among the bracken. The stream comes tumbling into the Dene from a high field, and near the little fall a water-ousel sets her pure white eggs. But the pride of the place is its wood-owls. All the year round 'everie night and alle,' they may be heard hoo-hooing, not in single cries but half-a-dozen or more in concert, each trying to surpass the other's melancholy. And their nests are easily found, being sometimes deep in the cleft of a tree, often in a disused crow's nest. It is not uncommon to catch them hawking about in the early afternoon in the darker parts of the wood ; and the most unobservant could not ignore their presence, for—whether from disease or accident one knows not—the owl is oftener found lying dead than any other bird. In a hedge running at right angles to the Dene the impudent magpies—which you may sometimes see impatiently awaiting the death of a sickly lamb—rear in disregard of pub-

licity their monstrous home, one of the most easily harried of all ; while the carrion-crow sometimes builds beside them, and sometimes on the outskirts of the rookery. And if these interest you not, the sweetest and most beautiful of all song birds are also to be found—the bullfinch in the thicket, the goldfinch in the hedge.

HOME

WITH adequate knowledge it would be interesting to resolve how far man's stubborn and invincible love of home extends into the lower forms of life. Such a tangle of sentiment and hysteria has grown up about and over 'my ain countree' and 'the little house where I was born,' that a deep and touching emotion has been all but drowned in a flood of worse than idle tears. It is as old as time, and that it is as enduring as nature is shown by its persistence to the very portals of death ;

As if the quiet bones were blest,
Among familiar names to rest.

The joyful gleam in Sir Walter's dying eye as on his last home-coming he caught sight of 'Gala Water-Buckholm-Torwoodlee,' proved that he struck no false note when he made his minstrel turn his last hopes to a death by Teviot ; nor was it any remnant of superstition that induced Carlyle to choose a grave in Ecclefechan. The institution of family vaults

appears at first glance an idle and a vain thing—idle and vain, too, the exhumation and shifting of mouldering bones, the arrangement of the dead according to parish and family. But dust has its affinities for dust, and not wholly illusory was the poet's consolation that

From his ashes may be made the violet of his native land.

By strong but invisible bonds inanimate acres hold fast to the handful from them that a life has gathered and held together. Men have commanded their urns to be emptied in mid-ocean, and have bequeathed their ashes to the vagrant wind, but Nature's most ardent and strenuous lovers cannot be forced into an abstract passion, or estranged from the kith and kin that shared their early sustenance. The grass with its springtide brightness and the playmates that rejoice in it, the oak and the tall poplar, the green corn and the lark that rises singing from its midst, are they not all foster children of the same nurse? When my tenancy is expired, and earth reclaims the body I have borrowed from her, shall it not be returned to the woods that have rustled to make me music, to the daisies that have known my feet, to the woodbine and primrose that gave me their earliest blooms rather than to alien flowers?

Artificial modes of life and thought affect this passion for home—this passion that is deeper than any philosophy—but to a very small degree. Faiths alter, and the fashion of them, so that instead of

desiring to rest under the shadow of the grey church and the dark yew trees, a man will leave his body to be burned, even as they burn the clothes of an infected corpse ; yet his friends will gather and treasure the incombustible remnant. But in any case solicitude about burial is only an incidental proof and striking illustration of a love that permeates life, and seems almost as strong in the wild birds whose flight is in scorn of space as in the vegetable fast-rooted and quiet in his corner. When the English snowdrop and crocus are cleaving the wet mould with their first protrusions of green, the swallow is hawking and twittering round the Pyramids ; yet a little while, and, seized with home-sickness, he will come back to their withered yellow and white. And it is not from love of the English Spring, nor is it anything to him that under the budding woods, where the rooks are building, the fern is preparing new fronds : in all that long journey his heart was held light and his spirit high by the memory of a spot whose area is measurable by inches, and where year after year his nest is made. His corner of the window, his nook in the barn, his eave of the out-house, thither so long as life and strength endure will he return as regularly as if, in departing, he had but stretched an elastic leash whose contraction drew him back. Other birds (like the crow) that abide by the same nest, keep an eye all the year round on the family dwelling, or take possession of a hole in the tree or a nook in the chimney as do the jackdaw and

starling. Those that annually change, building one year in the larch and another in the holly, or forsaking the primrose bank for the garden wall, move within a narrow area and still have a fixed home. If you catch a sparrow with a white feather in his wing (so that you may know him the more easily) and carry him to a distant county, you will find, if he stays in the neighbourhood (as probably he will), that the natives are continually chasing and pecking him, and that as like as not his death is the end of your experiment. Thus it would seem that not man alone has mapped out the world in territory, and district, and parish, but that his poor relations also have their frontiers. Such phenomena as the occurrence on small islands of species unknown to the neighbouring continent is proof positive that a bird is naturally a stay-at-home : that he uses the power of locomotion only upon compulsion of hunger or cold.

The oak on the hillside is anchored by his roots ; but the rabbits that play under his boughs, howbeit free to wander at will, are really held within a small circumference by their affection for the burrow where they live. Their comrades, too, have each a centre round which to circle. Your walk across the meadow and over the cornfield and into the plantation winds past a hundred homes. The field-mouse has his neat and tiny hole, the diminutive paths and highways all about it worn by the patter of his feet, and showing with what slender freedom he walks when, daring weasel

and owl, he ventures him forth. And so with vole and shrew, with fox and otter and badger, with hedgehog and squirrel ; each has one spot that is home to him, and whence he will not wander save under stress of necessity. Indeed, the very river appears to be a series of homes. The red-finned perches, that travel up and down in shoals, invariably come back to the deep hole close to the bank frayed by the beat of the water. In the summer days of three generations an aged and wary pike has held himself as if asleep in a pool all dense with water-weed, in a stream so gentle you may hardly discern the soft movement of the fin that enables him to withstand its compulsion. What angler has not essayed the great salmon that year after year returns from the sea to his quarters in the smooth pool by the willow ? The eel has his little holding of mud, and the bull-trout his fixed domain. Whoever knows a river knows that its tenants are as regularly visible as the blue speedwells in the grass, the sedges where the moor-hen makes her nest, or the holes in the bank to which the sand-martin comes back with Spring. The needs of life may drive them forth upon adventure, but they would fain return to their original abode.

The inevitable corollary is, that to live in most perfect adjustment to Nature, and in deepest sympathy with her, is to be possessed most strongly by the passion of home. During a lifetime, patriarchal in its term, hundreds of new scenes and new ideas effect a lodgment

in the poet's mind ; yet to the last there is none so strong and fresh and vivid as were garnered in boyhood, and that gain in enchantment with the lapse of time till the rugged elms, the house on the hillside, the ringing copse and spinney all bathed in the soft 'moonlight of memory,' take on a beauty beyond that of fairy-land. An attentive examination of the work of any student and lover of earth will show a remarkable limitation. What is new and real and valuable in it belongs to the few acres round about some woodland cottage or some quiet parsonage : the rest is but commentary and illustration ; for a man can do no more than widen his first impressions. At a first glimpse the world seems fairer than ever it will seem again. The sun is more cheerful, the dark and drifting clouds are more mysterious, the trees more stately, the flowers of finer hue ; for time not only blunts the edge of sense but explains the romance and reduces conjecture to mere circumstance. The jaded present seems to grow ever more hackneyed and more commonplace, but it casts a magic light on the past, blithening the dismal and brightening the dark into an ideal and perfect glory. And it well may be that the love of home in its final and supreme expression is only our hypnotic response to its strong compulsiveness.

ROBBERY FROM NATURE

AFTER a long, hard winter the calling voice of spring sounds its clear invitation even to the town's inmost heart. Something whispers the news to many who never saw dark elm-boughs rocking above wild snow-drops whiter than the lingering snow, or gathered the odorous violets brought by murmuring April to our English lanes—who do not know what it is to watch the first glister of flossy catkins on the river willow, the earliest tassels that flutter from the hazel twigs, to hear the first love music of the lark, to welcome the earliest primrose. But if life's stirring renewal is lightly felt and soon forgotten by these, it is gladly welcomed and cherished by the increasing number of those who, although obliged by modern conditions to inhabit the city, even amid the strife and din of its streets, lapse occasionally into dreams of clear brook and green field, and have leisure and means to gratify their longing. I refer neither to the few who compete for Highland deer-forests and are familiar figures by the fox-covert, whom spring calls to the salmon river and autumn to heather, and stubble, and turnip ; nor to the huge multitudes who on Bank Holiday rouse the dappled deer of Epping Forest with the noise of their merry-go-rounds, and people the beach at Margate, and swarm into every show-place within reach of an excursion ; but to a class between, in whose

lives there is more of ease than toil, who in youth were not trained to sport, and to whom taste, culture, and perhaps the doctor also, say that the purest recreation of their idle moments awaits them out of doors, in the open country. It is their custom to steal away to the fields or the sea-beach, not at set seasons, as when the may-fly is on the river, or when autumnal leaves rival the pheasant's plumage in richness of tint, nor at set holidays, but at any time of the year when circumstances admit and the sun offers a pressing invitation.

But the restless Englishman in his idlest moments longs for an occupation. It is a physical impossibility for him to dangle his legs over a grassy river-bank and do nothing more important than drop pebbles into the running stream. If he care neither for golf nor any kindred pastime, and if he does not shoot, angle, row, sketch, garden, or give himself to books, the chances are greatly in favour of his seeking amusement in the study of natural history ; for this pursuit, the increasing popularity of which is a healthy reaction from the too feverish city life of our time, offers a combination of attractions. By investing the open-air ramble with a purpose it removes the uneasy twitchings of conscience absolute idleness is apt to engender in men habitually busy. There are few so constituted as in a perfectly aimless stroll to derive a full and quiet pleasure from a merely passive submission to the caresses of Nature, and who, when she

fans them with the soft breath of summer and smiles from blue seas that reflect the blue of heaven, and from white-crested wave and green swaying, waving bough, and throat of bird and beast sings her tuneful music, while the very moor is golden with gorse, and every hedgeroot, and ditch, and waste corner has its flower, can imagine no happier paradise. Nor is it everyone who is able to take an interest in minute and practically objectless observations; who, for example, at the season when dry rustling thickets have not yet recovered from the dormancy of winter, are content to sit on a scrubby knoll in the woodlands, and while they watch the cloud shadows flicker and pass over russet dead fern, and withered grass, count the voices of the March wind—how it rustles and whispers in the low beech-leaves, spared by winter storms, and travels with a long sigh through the shrivelled herbage; how it goes swish, swish, swish among the bending tree-tops, and gives a long strong sigh to the pollards; how it laments on the height and in the hollow circles in the faint beginning of a roar that chokes and dies away ere its volume is increased. Nay, it requires either a peculiar temperament or a long training to watch even the movements of living things with quiet and continued patience. There is close to a certain highway a still pond bordered with oaks, and in spring it is as clear as to show in sunny days every vein of the rotting leaves that floor its bed. Being deflected by the trees, the wind

never blows evenly across its surface, but in capfuls, whose swift course as they dart hither and thither at various angles is marked in a chase of tiny darkling ripples. It is an ideal ocean for schoolboys, and on holiday and in playhour is white with the sails of their mimic fleet ; for that very reason it is shunned by the ordinary student of nature, who is sure they have stoned or terrified to death every living inhabitant of its water. But to-day they are conning Virgil and Euclid, and look you at the circling wavelets like those produced by the rise of a trout or the bobbing of an angler's cork—these never were made by the wind. Approach, and in a moment all is still as was the mere whereinto Sir Bedevere plunged Excalibur. Wait a little, however, and a score of heads, each jewelled with eyes of matchless beauty and 'freaked with jet,' like Milton's pansy, are thrust cautiously up, and a company of frogs with the full sweet low entreaty for which croaking is too harsh a term, recommence their interrupted love-making. To the true student of nature who, even to a mean degree, possesses some spark of the spirit that animated a Jefferies or a Thoreau, each little comedy of courtship played there is as interesting as is to old age the innocent sweethearting of youth, or a wholesome drama to dawning womanhood ; though perhaps of him, as of Wordsworth's ideal poet, it may be said that he was

Contented if he might enjoy
The things which others understand.

If an inference may be drawn from recent manifestations of taste, it would appear that there is an increase in the number of those who find that, apart from the thirst for knowledge and arrangement and classification, there is an interest in life and matter and motion, and that the green fields and towering mountains and rushing waters of earth are not wholly to be regarded as staging and scenery for human action, or matter for analysis, and that even the low form of worship Carlyle contemptuously set aside as view-haunting is not to be altogether despised.

But the average man, even though he appreciate this gift in others, desires for himself something more active than mere contemplation, more definite and positive than the observation, that is a reflection of enjoyment rather than an accumulation of facts. And so his devotion to nature takes the form of collecting, wherein he at once finds a pastime that involves no acute physical distress, a mild excitement with a flavour of sport outlet for the universal human desire to gather something, and a pleasing consciousness that he is furthering science and amassing information.

The collection of natural objects has advantages over every form of the same passion. Who would gather china or curios, books or pictures, is doomed to wander in dingy streets, to rummage ancient shop and stall, to frequent stuffy auction-rooms, and with the enthusiasm for his hobby to cultivate also the

astuteness of a horse-coper and the close-fistedness of a retail grocer. But Nature loads with unsought gifts those who seek her treasures, and it is no poisonous wind, but the fresh sea-breeze, that blows upon him who clammers the rocks and examines the tide-pool for shells and algae; ferns hide in the shadiest and most sequestered nooks; wild flowers and birds-nests—the very mention of them suggests—

. . . a season between June and May,
Half pranked with spring, with summer half imbrowned.

He who flies at no higher game than moss and lichen will still be led to ivied and crumbling ruins and cool dells where vivid green carpets the earth and a cushion is thrown on the boulders. And whether a man's pursuit carry him to the sea-beach or the forest, to the river or the rill, it is crowned with health.

Nevertheless, the desire to hoard and save and gather that so often changes a bright enjoyable amusement into an insensate passion, lies in wait even for the naturalist; and what in others is a pardonable weakness, becomes in him a crime against society—a bibliomaniac seized with a craze for filling his shelves with curious books he hardly ever dreams of opening, and whose hunger to acquire has swallowed up the higher love of reading, though he be but a miser under a different guise, is still of service to the community. It is impossible for a book to have more than one owner at a time, and it is an advantage that he should

rescue it from obscure and unsafe keeping. But the birds that twitter by dusty highway and woodland path, the nests and eggs concealed by them among the green boughs and tall grass, the heaths and grasses, wild flowers and ferns, the mosses and fungi that luxuriously garment the fertile land, and are never wholly absent on the barest scrap of rock or dreariest upland moor, are common property, and never more delightful than in their appointed places. The amateur of curios and the antiquary are able to preserve and beautify and enhance the value of their relics. It is not so with the out-of-door collector. A preserved plant is beneath comparison with a living one, an egg's more brilliant colours fade from the moment it is blown, fur and plumage are slightly but perceptibly dulled by death, and the most adept taxidermist can show but one attitude of a creature whose chiefest charm lies in change and movement. 'Well-preserved specimens,' says an enthusiastic authority, 'will last for ever and a day;' but what he means is, that if assiduously preserved from defilement and mutilation, and insects, a well-stuffed bird may possibly last for a century. Long before that period elapses it will become in the eyes of a lover of nature (as distinguished from the student of natural history) as unlike a living bird as a mummy is unlike a human being.

Nature is so bountiful that without any perceptible impoverishment she is able to fill the cabinets and

museums necessary to scientific research, to give the artist enough of specimens to draw from, and even to satisfy the amateur as long as his numbers do not inordinately multiply, and he is content with the result of his own exertions. But her riches are not inexhaustible, and if the rage for collecting is allowed to go on developing at its present rate, in a country so densely populated as England, it must soon result in a very serious diminution of our avi-fauna. It puts as it were the finishing-touch upon the destruction necessary to agriculture and game-preserving. We drain mere and lake, and the bittern that boomed from the Lincolnshire fens and the swampy regions round the upper Isis and the Border mires and bogs is driven from a home to which if he attempts to return he is a target for the collector's gun; even the very curlew has to retreat as the ploughshare rives up the waste land above which he loves to pipe his melancholy tune. As soon as ever a bird grows sufficiently scarce to possess a money value, it is hardly possible for it to escape; not because amateurs are so numerous and vigilant, but because the net of the dealer is spread so wide. There is hardly a pot-hunter or shore-prowler who does not know the value of a specimen, and it is a common practice to blaze away on chance at any large or unusual bird, whether it be a rare visitor like the night heron or an estray from an ornamental water like the tame swans of Lord Ducie's that fell victims to a zeal for natural history. When abroad with his gun the

amateur is not a whit more merciful. 'I must tell you to shoot an unknown bird on sight; it may give you the slip in a moment and a prize may be lost,' says the author of 'Field and General Ornithology;' and there never was a precept more regularly acted upon. The misfortune is, that so many of our visitors are unknown in this sense. On the Cambridge and Oxon hills, which once were visited by flights of dotterel, this bird, when he halts for a day *en route* to his hilly breeding-grounds, is annually shot as a stranger, and will soon be driven from our shores. Of the golden orioles one sees in provincial exhibitions and museums, nearly all are in full breeding plumage, and in some cases were confessedly slain while constructing the hanging nest they attach to a forked bough.

The worst sufferers, however, are undoubtedly the birds of prey, those that of all others most enhance the beauty of landscape; for there is not in the realm of wings anything more beautiful than the sight of a white skua hawking along a rocky coast, a hen harrier quartering the meadows like a setter, an eagle swooping from his eyrie. But the stuffer knows well that for these he has a ready custom. An owl with beady eyes looking down on a mouse in its talons, a sparrow-hawk holding a young partridge, a jay or a magpie making off with eggs—these are representations of life dear to the heart of a certain type of householder. 'I have seen,' says Mr. Aplin in his

‘Birds of Oxfordshire,’ ‘as many as fifteen (barn-owls) in a bird-stuffer’s shop in May, all of which had been recently received.’ Nearly thirty years ago, when an extraordinary plague of mice swarmed over the Border farms, it was soon checked by the vast number of carnivora attracted to the spot. Since then game-keeper and collector have steadily pursued the work of extermination, and as a result millions of little pilferers have arisen to spoil husbandry. Sparrow clubs and associations for suppressing wood-pigeons do the work of hawk and falcon. So enormously have starlings increased that it is almost certain they will have to change their diet and steal grain and fruit (which they will already do under stress of hunger), instead of destroying grubs and insects; just as the rook, from the same cause, annually seems to delight more in eggs and young birds. As to common linnet, and finch, and thrush, and blackbird, there is no gardener who does not wince under the increasing extent of their depredations.

This state of things is, in large measure, due to the inordinate slaughter of birds of prey; the doubt is, whether the game-keeper or the collector is the more to blame for it. The former began by thinning down the golden and white-tailed eagles, the osprey and buzzards, the kite, merlin, and peregrine and sparrowhawk to a point after which a specimen is more or less of a rarity; and the other completes the work of destruction. Probably the dealer is, in both cases, at

the root of the evil, for he at once offers an unfailing market for the sale and exchange of specimens, and by his action puts a premium on the extermination of species. On the other hand, there has been during recent years a distinct growth in the number of those who, with no eye to the beauties of nature and no studious aim, have taken to collecting as a light and elegant amusement. One often sees them at work on the shore, on waste or common land, and on farms where the landlords, since the passing of the Ground Game Act, have abandoned the shooting. But, to realise how injurious to wild life this latest fancy is, it is necessary to turn to one of the numerous manuals of instruction drawn up for the guidance of beginners.

‘How many birds of the same kind do you want?’ is a question asked in one of the best and most reasonable of these popular handbooks, and the answer is: ‘*All you can get*—with some reasonable limitations; say fifty or a hundred of any but the most abundant and widely diffused species.’ To attain this end, the novice is exhorted to begin ‘by shooting every bird you can,’ and he is assured that he will ‘do very well’ if he can average twelve birds a day during the season, although forty or fifty will be bagged by the adept. While the sportsman only counts heads, however, the ornithologist must look to variety; and unless he has made a rare species still rarer, has no ground for pride. On that account his season is in autumn and in spring, when the dif-

ferent migrants are come ; the time of nest-building having peculiar attractions. If strange eggs are discovered, it is generally possible to entrap the dam with a noose of horsehair placed over the nest, and the eminent ornithologist already quoted is strong on the advantage of securing females. 'Bird-life is too beautiful a thing to destroy to no purpose,' he says, and then, after quoting 'Not a sparrow falleth to the ground without His notice,' he proceeds in the next sentence, 'I should not neglect to speak particularly of the care to be taken to secure full *suites* of females,' and shows the great advantages to science of getting them in the breeding season, and thus science conspires with fashion and game-preserving to rob our English fields of their natural inhabitants.

THE GULL POND

STANDING on one of the lonely Orcadian shores on a summer day, I have often thought that of all things winged sea-birds offer the most perfect type of wild and happy freedom. The cruising gannet, high in air one moment, the next dropping like a stone upon his prey beneath the water ; the grey gull winging hither and thither on mighty pens or riding buoyant on the seas ; the diver ready between the sighting of a gun and the pulling of a trigger to dive down where

the drowned shipmen and the broken argosies and the mermaids are ; even the greedy, idle cormorant, lazily rocking in the bay—all these seem kith and kin to breeze and billow and sunbeam, reckless as these and as these undominated. There is no passing for this fancy within earshot of the deep ; but it fades and vanishes inland. If the gull ever lapses into commonplace it is in early spring, when he joins the rooks in that busy, fluttering, piebald crowd that follows the ploughman's furrow. Even Mr. Swinburne could scarce get up a rapture over a 'grey brother' gobbling worms as an alderman gobbles early peas.

Yet there is at least one sea-bird, the black-headed gull, that carries the charm of ocean to his retreat inland. To some two or three districts he comes in thousands at the call of spring, and for a few months a common pond—not large enough to be dignified with the name of lake—is transformed by him into a sight so beautiful it never fails to surprise and enchant the lucky wretch who comes upon it unawares. He is listening for the first crake of the landrail, or delighting in the spreading limes and beeches of a roadside park, when gradually his ears are filled with the long withdrawing roar of the sea on a gravel beach. There is no mistaking it. Ceaselessly it goes on, not harsh nor yet musical, rising and falling, till he looks to see at the next turn a long low shore, the curled waves falling on it with a break, and the broken water running murmurous along the strand. Far

other is the sight that waits him. A myriad black and white things are fluttering and calling over a pond of many islands ; their plumage is a-sheen with love and spring ; their voices, trained amid rock and breaker, are harmonised into such an inimitable echo of the sea's music as might convince the most doubting that, even as the piping wind has been the music-master of lesser songsters, so the mew has learned his note from the voices of his native element. Wave a white handkerchief till all but the most maternal of mothers have sprung with a gleam into the noisy circle, and you might imagine a nor'-easter was driving his white water-hounds upon a rocky coast. Sit down quietly on a tree-stump till the excitement subsides, and lo ! the noise is diminished to that of summer waves on a sandy shore. Except in the dead of night it is never absolutely stilled. There is such a constant coming and going, a bickering and gossiping and jabbering, as makes you think of the motion of a bee-hive and the riot of a rookery.

The gull is more picturesque than the rook, but he has not that black citizen's sturdy and staying qualities. You may shoot a rookery till you think that scarce a fledgling can be left ; and yet the parents—who hate and fear gunpowder with a peculiar intensity—will reappear next season and brave it all over again. A gull does not lend itself twice to an affront of that sort. Many old haunts have been forsaken for what the rooks would think no reason at all. For

instance, if the winter has been wet and the nesting places are covered with water, explorers will come to see what things look like, and then carry the colony elsewhere—‘it may be for years, and it may be for ever.’ Again, the female gull favours her human acquaintances up to a certain point. Long ago, when landed proprietors were less ‘cultured’ than now, and looked on a parcel of unshootable gulls as less an ornament than a nuisance, it was customary to farm the pond to those who sold the young and eggs, which are very pretty eating. Now, Minnehaha—a rendering more free than accurate of the scientific *Larus Ridibundus*—seems up to a certain point to see the justice of this : not being Irish, she does not expect to live rent free, and she will therefore go so far as to lay three sets of eggs a season—one for the landlord, one for the hungry birds-nester, and a third which she thought to hatch. But, as usual, the middleman turned out a rack-renter, and if she had gone on laying all the summer it would have been the same ; so Minnehaha took the pet, and never came back again. Another scare was more effectual still. One spring I was fishing in a little mere among the Cheviots, which twenty or thirty years ago was always at that season crowded with gulls. Not one comes now, though many devices have been tried to bring them : eggs having even been hatched there in the hope that, being natives, the young migrants would return. Here it was not a case of over-flooding. The place was fancied

by the mallard (long strings of whose flappers may still be seen swimming among the reeds), and the wild duck was a temptation to the gunner, and the gunner scared away the gull. A strict embargo must be laid alike on guest and gamekeeper if the visitors from the sea are not to have their feelings hurt.

In consequence of this the gull pond is a refuge and gathering-place for many kinds of water-birds, and the gull suffers somewhat among them on account of the bold, frank, fearless ways he has learned in the course of his seafaring life. The duck and the water-hen and the bald-pated coot, which are here in immense numbers, take some trouble to conceal their nests, even if they do not go so far as to cover their eggs with weed like the cunning little dabchick, or dull the brightness of them every time they go out ; but the gull twists sedge and grass and reed into a nest conspicuous among the scores of others round it on the bare earth, lays her eggs therein, and then composedly and in view of all men sets about hatching them. More than that, although being strange to trees she seldom perches on them, let her but fancy the grass of the park and she goes and sits there, not watchful and wary, and ready to run like a water-rail, or fly away like a duck at the first alarm, but with a noble composure ; though, if you walk along the further shore of the pond, and along the edge of the wood and so to the gorse, you will find many a heap of bones and white feathers to tell of the vixen's

passage, and what the nature of her prey when at early dusk she left her brood to prowl round pond and covert. The flavour of a water-bird has a peculiar zest for Reynard and his cubs, or he would hardly leave the well-stocked warren and the pheasantry for the river sedges and the bulrushes by the mere. And his taste is shared by the weasel, who will stealthily leap on the mallard's back as she floats inshore, and take a ducking for his pains if he cannot get at her throat before she dives.

In the quiet pond breeding goes on apace, and soon grey nestlings are seen swimming in the parent's wake, with tiny, dumpy flappers and long trains of coots and those handfuls of living soot which come from the nest of the moor-hen. The Spring moisture and the hind's toil bring to the surface millions of grubs, which keep the gull's larder always fully plenished ; and ere the bare fields are quite hidden by green corn and grass, when the rook begins to feel a difficulty in foraging for her clamant young, and the stagnant water is filled with weeds, and the islands are rank with vegetation ; when bumpkins meeting on the road cry out against the drought and the heat, then the gull's sojourn at her inland haunt is well-nigh over. The movement seaward is not made suddenly or in combination. When the breeding season is done, the black heads lose something of their brilliance, and with the burnish goes the love of dalliance. The grey fledglings, which do not achieve the dignity of a black

cap till the following Spring, grow daily stronger ; and one fine morning, after a little preliminary exercising, a family will extend its ramble for a score of miles to where a cool breeze is driving the white-fringed water over sand and shoal ; one household follows another, as each is relieved from pressing domestic duties, till the last mother is found vainly trying to coax her belated brood to forsake the unnatural company in grass and thicket for that of the kittiwakes and divers and the freedom of the coast ; and if you come that way to joy in the voice of the sea, you will only hear the landrail crying from the park, the pheasant's scream from the thicket, the loud quack of the mallard, and the shriek of the bald-pate. Not till the March winds bring back the violet will the lost music sound again.

THE STOCK-DOVE

LET it be said in the stock-dove's praise, that not by obtrusiveness, nor over-multiplication, nor the villainy of pillage has he made himself a nuisance. Whether he is or is not thriving outrageously is what none knows, though appearances are in favour of his prosperity. White of Selborne, in spite of diligent inquiry, never seems to have found where he breeds, nor did his correspondents either ; and as it is now not difficult to discover his nests, the fact would seem to indicate an increase of numbers. But as, unlike

his cousin the cushat, he is a regular migrant, and while he is with us will hide among the tall beeches, feed with a crowd of relatives, and altogether live a life of ease and retirement, none can tell if his times are good or bad. He is the least distinguished of doves. Many country folk, and some sportsmen, believe with their forefathers of a hundred years ago that he has no separate existence—that his name is but an *alias* of the cushat. It is like enough, indeed, that the rural legend of the cushat's song has been developed from this very confusion of identity. Long ago, it says, the cushat nested among nettles or grass on the ground, while the partridge abode in trees. One day, however, two cows trampled the cushat's eggs to pieces. A Welshman came and drove one beast out of the pasture, and the cushat, as he flitted to his new home in the tree-tops, sang and still sang to him, 'tak two coos, Taffy-tak.' I may remark that this onomatopœia is far truer to the sound than Gawin Douglas's in his exquisite description of the 'gentildow,' which is simply, 'I come hidder to wow.' That, however, is by the way. What I wanted to remark is that this notion of the cushat building on the ground is not so mad as it seems, for that the stock-dove does so regularly. As the two birds resemble each other closely, the country-folk would naturally conclude that the cushat it was which had his home below.

Here, indeed, the stock-dove differs from all the rest of the family. You seek the ring-dove's nest in

a tall hedge, a low fir, or a holly ; and, if the district is the right one, there is nothing wonderful in coming upon the equally fragile and slovenly house of the turtle. Again, the rock-dove, like his domestic descendant, loves a dark corner to build his cot of twigs and grass in, and on this point he and the stock-dove are more or less at one. In the books the latter bird is usually described as building in hollows of trees, like the starling and the jackdaw of many districts ; and this is doubtless true. Supposing, however, that I wanted a stock-dove's egg, I should not go to the forest, but to a well-remembered spot where as a boy—with shame be it spoken—I often did that crime which Shenstone's mistress would not pardon :

For he ne'er could be true, she averred,
That could rob a poor bird of its young,
And I blessed her the more when I heard
Such tenderness fall from her tongue.

I know an old quarry on a lone hillside where the 'red' (or refuse) has streamed down the brae and been intercepted here and there by whins. Above is a wooded knoll, planted with fir-trees, stubbornly upright though gnarled and twisted by long sequences of nor'-easters, and with one or two stunted oaks and elms in the shelter. Below, the neat and hedgerowed fields stretch far across the slow stream, winding in and out like a serpent of silver, now between arable and pasture, and anon fringed with willows or half-hid in woodland. Beyond the moorland rises into a hill and then slopes to

the sea, while a crescent of mountains half-shuts the landscape in. Here in the season you may always count on finding a stock-dove's nest in the rough grass on the brae-side under a whin-bush ; but he prefers better hiding than bare earth and a shrub will give, and he will take advantage of any cleft or excavation in the rocks, frequently choosing (like the jackdaw) a disused rabbit-hole, into which he penetrates about an arm's length. Many people think his preference is for timber, and that he only takes to the ground in default of better nesting ; but this I do not believe. There are trees all over the district already referred to ; ashes and elms in the hedgerows, oaks and beeches singly or in clumps on every windy knoll and waste corner, limes and plane-trees and chestnuts in the parks, strips, plantations and spinneys everywhere, pheasant covers where the young firs are tall enough for cushat, innumerable old woods and a river-side forest. And yet the stock-dove chooses the ground to nest on ; apparently from a freak as unintelligible as that which will sometimes, even in close proximity to creviced tree or ruin, cause the jackdaw to forsake both for a rabbit-hole.

When the eggs are found it is seen that they do not materially differ from those of the wood-pigeon. As is the way of doves there are only two, which seems to show how strong among wild birds is convention. There seems no reason in the nature of things why two should be the limit. If the eggs are taken early

in the season, the mother will produce two more ; if a third is added to the original couple, and it happens to hatch out about the same time they do, all three will be reared, but there she stops. Two is the tradition, two is the proper thing, two is respectability, and she knows it. As for her young, they are easily tamed as cushats, and like these grow very bold and familiar if well treated. It is not an impossible feat to teach them to pass out and in the dovecote, or breed in captivity, but they do not mate with the tame pigeon ; in spite of the once current belief that assigned them the position now universally conceded to the wild blue rock of being the original of our domestic pigeons.

Less is known of the stock-dove's habits than about those of far rarer birds, the fact being that only an ornithologist has any great inducement to hunt him up. If he were on the game list, or if he made into delicate pie, things might be different, for sportsmen and pot-hunters would make it their business to find out all about him. Not being so, he is allowed to live what is practically a life of peace. When he does get into trouble the cause is usually bad company, and the time after the breeding season. While living *en famille* he is as fond of privacy as the typical English lord. But though too conscientious altogether to neglect the domestic duties, he evidently regards them much as Sir Thomas Browne did, and performs them with as much rapidity as is consistent with self-respect

He shows little of the bridegroom's impatience. Ere he has chosen his mate the cuckoo is sounding his clear call as he flies from copse to copse, the sky-blue eggs of the hedge-sparrow have chipped and yielded callow birdlets, and the voice of the rook has hoarsened with love. He runs up a house that it is no libel to call jerry-built, and I fancy that, unlike the cushat, which breeds almost as frequently as a house pigeon, he thinks once a year quite enough for this sort of thing. The cushat it is that delights the countryman with the rumour of his passion during so many of the months ; at any rate it is rare to find a stock-dove's nest either very early or very late.

When nesting is over he gives himself up to that placid enjoyment of life for which he thinks he was born. It would fare better with him, however, if he had not the habit of joining himself to lawless bands of cushats, and getting embroiled in the ceaseless war which the farmer wages upon them. Were he but content to share the mast on the beech-trees with them, all were well with him ; but he must needs join their forays in the corn land and come home to roost with them at night, and the shooter, waiting at a likely corner of the field with two or three dead decoys (their heads propped on sticks), or watching under a favourite pine for the general homing, is at no pains to distinguish nicely between him and his friends. What is it to him whether his quarry has or has not a white ring on neck ? or that he is smaller

than a cushat should be? or that he wears dark spots on his oar feathers? Then the hour is usually dusk; the stock-dove is just about the size of a Norwegian wood-pigeon newly landed on British shores; and so it often happens that he falls, when recognised he had perhaps been spared. The farmer's feud does not extend to him at all, or would not do so if he were better known; for to him is referable much of the good with which the cushat is credited. It is known that the latter is an inveterate thief, loving the husbandman's corn as nothing but the forbidden thing is loved; but the stock-dove has a genuine relish for wild mustard-seed and other pests of the field which his cousin will only eat under compulsion. If you doubt it, shoot a couple in the act of feeding together, or, better still, shoot half-a-dozen of both species; and when you open their crops, you will find that in the same field they have elected to feed on different stuffs. Of course that is speaking roughly; for what one will peck at so will the other.

Another proof of the stock-dove's cultivated habit is his dislike of a British winter. A rough, a coarse, a democratic cushat may choose as he will to shiver on naked fence and icy bough, to pine for hunger and die of cold in our wild climate; but when the wind begins to breathe the chill of the snow, when the water in the turnip-drills turns to ice and foraging grows difficult, then does the stock-dove hie him away to his winter resort in the milder parts of Europe. There

doth he abide in comfort till the something in the air tells him that life is reviving to the familiar wood ; that the golden whin bloom is gladdening the hillside ; that spring is again alert in grass and tree. But even here he goes by no rule. Some members of his family stay the year round with us, and probably some that leave us never come back, for wild pigeons of all kinds are averse from 'flitting' when they are comfortable.

IN THE GARDEN

THE 'Complete Gardener' still remains unwritten on the bookshelves of dreamland ; but that it has not been accomplished is due to no want of trying. Whatever the literary wants of the gardener may be, whether practical information about his craft or poetical musing over it such as he might read in his summer-house, there is an extensive library wherefrom he may choose. But the one excellent book—the volume that will instruct the amateur and delight him ; that will be to him encyclopædia and Shakespeare in one ; that will tell him when to delve, and sow, and graft, and prune, how to cross, and rear, and fertilise, and yet preserve the poetry of lawn, and border, and shrubbery ; that will instruct him as to the duties of the changing seasons, and reproduce in its pages the spirit of the pageant of nature, is still, if I mistake not, to be numbered among things unaccomplished.

As a childless man watching robust youth at play discovers a pensive delight in imagining the son who never can be his, so the gravel walk and the rose-bushes suggest many a visionary plan of this quite impossible volume. It is not to be a book for use or consecutive reading, but one to lie in that nook of the summer-house where a thumbed Chaucer and a worn 'Decameron' adjoin the jar of tobacco, and provide entertainment when the rushing thunder-shower is pelting the green leaves and making a babbling waterway of the path. The binding should be of strong leather, and the type large and pleasant. Pictures and illustrations there will be none, but the head-pieces and the tail-pieces are to be ingeniously devised and formed of English material. Blossomy twigs of pear and plum tree like Aaron's rod that budded, an apple shining ruddy among withering leaves, sprays of roses half-opened, tall sunflowers, and hollyhocks, and dahlias, beds of fragrant pink and gilliflower, a line of daisies white and red, pure snowdrop and yellow crocus flouting at winter, fair lilies and daffodils such as Herrick loved, making a glory of Spring; drawings of these not with garish and obtrusive splendour, but modestly, are to be laid across the top of the page. For the bottom I would ravish field, and wood, and river-side. Golden whin with a grey linnet's nest, 'the broom, the yellow broom,' a mossy crab and trailing mistletoe, cowslip and wild marigold and violet, forget-me-nots blowing on the fallow where the

pewits are, poppies like red bubbles of blood on October stubble, wild mustard showing its clear yellow in the green corn ; not forgetting the dandelion, the crow's foot, the fennel and the fern ; these from Nature's own fair garden, Nature who weaves a chaplet of bramble flowers for the thicket and clothes the desolate hills in a purple garment of heath, and fills quiet lanes with the sweet briar's fragrance.

In further illustration the 'Complete Gardener' shall be as full of quotation as old Burton's 'Anatomy.' Carlyle praising that supreme tribute to the lilies that 'toil not neither do they spin ;' Lord Tennyson's brief pictures from the 'swamps and hollows grey' of his native county : Jefferies dwelling on a memory of Coate ; Mr. Andrew Lang translating :—

April pride of murmuring
Winds of Spring,
That beneath the winnowed air
Trap with subtle nets and sweet
Flora's feet,
Flora's feet, the fleet and fair ;

these, and many other moderns, but more that are old, shall quicken discernment and sharpen vision till every leafy curve and flowery tint is revealed in utmost beauty. Yet it may not be forgotten that gardening is a secluded and cloistered pleasure, and by a sober melancholy differentiated from the rude and gross joys of fashion. When the orchard grass is white with fallen blossoms and the leaves all green are

quivering to the Spring wind's caress, and the budding plants are modestly rejoicing in the first kisses of the sun ; like a white cloud on a Summer sea a pensive moral shall play over, darkening yet deepening the spectator's sympathy with the glowing palpitating life that is bursting from every pore of earth. How like to human beings, he may exclaim as he thinks of Winter and death, and recalls the melancholy epitaph :

Earth goeth on the earth,
Glistening like gold ;
Earth cometh to the earth,
Sooner than it wold.

As, with regret that he should shorten their lives by a single day, he tenderly cuts them for his table, he shall with the aid of George Herbert suck melancholy from the act :

But him did beckon to the flowers, and they
By noon most cunningly did steal away,
And withered in my hand.

With Herrick too he shall exclaim, 'Fair daffodils, we weep to see you haste away so soon,' and thus carefully attune his soul to the delicate note of mourning that runs like a thread through the happiest cords of nature.

An advantage of dealing with an imaginary book is that you need imagine only those portions that would catch the eye of an accomplished skimmer as he idly turned the pages. It is a form of authorship

that involves no hackwork. Wherever solid information or instruction is required you leave a blank page to be filled in on the next rainy day, and then—why then ‘To-morrow, and to-morrow, and to-morrow’—as dreaming Coleridge wrote at the break of an unended poem. When I should be deep in detail thought wanders away to fashion an ideal outfit for the complete gardener.

Who will follow the calling of Adam worthily shall begin by loving flowers as a scholar loves books, not for the glory of having a great collection, still less for an unintelligent or semi-commercial pride in what is rare and expensive, but for themselves, their fragrance, their beauty, their foliage, or for the many curious reproductive and other gifts given them by Nature. His enthusiasm should never pass into zealotry; he should be astride of his hobby, not ridden by it. He is a Sybarite and cuts the new-blown roses to make a *pot-pourri* as delicate as that exhaled by the Bishop de Vannes; he shall be a *gourmet* and prepare his own mushrooms in the manner laid down by the Baron de Brisse. There is much else that he cannot avoid being. Botany is inseparable from his craft. Entomology is of the very essence of it, since Darwin and others have so fully explained that ‘where the bee sucks’ the fertilisation or hybridisation—what we call the origination of new species is taking place. ‘Even at night,’ says a pleasant American writer, ‘in fragrant gardens, in lonely

meadows, in the most sequestered woods the process of insect fertilisation goes on continuously.' The great hawk-moths flit in the early moonlight from one white flower to another ; the rapid *Lepidoptera*, chased by the bats, drink from the fragrant chalices, or in a playful hunt across the stream tempt the trout from his hiding-place. 'The flowering period of my Japanese honeysuckle,' adds he, 'I have always found a certain index to the commencement of night-fishing.' If the pursuit of science tempt him further, he may study the mysterious alchemy by which vegetation transforms earth's rocks and juices into vivid leaf and nodding flower, draws up the hard flint to support the green corn-stalks, and in decay itself discovers anew the materials of life.

It is perhaps more to his sorrow than his pride that the complete gardener must be something of an ornithologist. The slender joy of watching the chaffinch on the apple-tree, or hearing the owl cry in moonlight, is more than counterbalanced by the misery of having to wage continual war upon the little thief who carries no purse, for he steals all he wants, the prolific and impudent sparrow, 'the rook down in the devil's book in roundhand,' and the host of pretty torments who play havoc with the flower-beds and the early peas. The bullfinch ruins his buds and the merle his strawberries, while the very swallows come and build in the chimneys and spoil his meditation with their twittering. Yet the thrush piping

on a wet spray after a shower, the robin whistling amid leaves as brown as his wing, even the frog's croaking rouse his enthusiasm as does the music of the cicada,

Charmer of longing, councillor of sleep !
The corn-field's chorister,
Whose wings to music whir.

These, however, are but incidental and circumjacent delights of gardening. The true Adamite glories in colour as a painter does, but his flowers are not massed nor his blooms mingled to tattoo earth's bosom with a picture ; he has delicate nostrils, but the object of his life is not to produce fragrance ; he is a philosopher, a poet, and a student of science, but only in his spare hours, that he may have matter to reflect upon as he rests from toil or smokes the last and most delicious evening pipe in his shrubbery. Beyond and above all these, there is a strong and inexplicable charm in the art itself. Paint, and music, and old songs have their wizardry ; when clouds scud before the western wind the gun and the rod have a spite in them ; but the sure and quiet magic of the garden, the necromancy of life and death as it is accomplished there, is to those who are called the most potent of all.

PHILOMEL

TO realise the strange and almost horrible mingling of beauty and squalor, of passion and indifference, of harmony and discord, that composes into life, there is no more helpful experience than to stand between eleven and twelve at night 'list'ning the nightingale' on the skirts of Epping Forest. In cherry orchards, when the moon shines so brightly that leaf and flower are as easily distinguished as in broad daylight, you think you find in him all the rejoicing merriment that Coleridge found ; and to hear him in some other environment is to agree with Milton that he was 'most musical, most melancholy.' But to come upon him in the wood, out of which he was banished for warbling in, the lonely places where St. Edward used to pray, is to recognise that both the sorrow and the joy were in the listening ear. Here your mind rejects the legendary fancy that he is lamenting or rejoicing his fate, here you can not figure him as a human spirit in the likeness of a brown bird.

Within the radius of a few miles is many a green, unvisited coppice, ringed in with fresh, cool ferns, where the buds are breaking on the sweetbriar, and the foliage is virgin and undefiled ; but in these you might stand for ever without hearing note of his. Yet here, in these woodlands bedraggled and shamed by

the neighbourhood of the great city, his melody rings from a hundred corners.

Call and challenge and retort are carolled from polluted thicket to prostituted grove, from degraded bush to trodden and squalid undergrowth. Nay (you say), but at night the tall trees are as majestic and mysterious near the city as out in the wild, with none but the visitant winds to mark their great transfiguration. But you shall not ravish yourself to Arcady by this trick of fancy. It is past eleven ; the suburban public-houses are closed ; the paths that lead by your chorister's perch are dotted with reeling drunkards—some exclaiming within a few yards of him that it is ' three — miles to Stratford,' others profaning the still and solemn night with an inevitable refrain ; a cartload of girls from a bean-feast, a tipsy picnic party, a horn-blowing coach-and-four, a brass band very much out of tune, a concertina kept going by a blunt unsteady touch, the puffing and clanking of a train—all these are here, and all these bear each his testimony that there is a mighty difference between the skirts of Epping and the haunted groves of Arden ! But the nightingales do not know it. Experience has taught that there is nothing to fear from these strayed revellers, and they sing on indifferent as the wind. And if yourself be able, you also, to put off your interest in things external : if you will be content for a time neither to anticipate nor to remember, neither to sorrow nor to rejoice, but to

accept the noisy drunkard and the shining stars as phenomena exciting neither sadness nor exultation ; you shall soon discover that the merriment, as the melancholy, of Philomel is but a fancy bred of fable. Of all the epithets applied to him by poets, that one of Shelley's, the 'voluptuous' nightingale, is the most expressive and exact. He exults not, neither grieves, nor sings he from the skylark's joy in being. The least fanciful might be forgiven for imagining that the wind, blowing hither and thither, rustles a sigh of regret out of the summer pines ; that there is 'lamentation and mourning and woe' in the song of breaking waves. It is not so with the nightingale. His merest 'whit-whit-whit' in the bush beside one, gives one precisely the same feeling of arrested attention that is imparted by the entrance of a great actor. One low and almost plaintive call he has, as it were a signal to some lost mate ; but the very first note of the prelude to his 'amorous descant' tells you at once that here is the richest of bird voices, here the perfection of bird music. There is no mistaking its intent. The minstrel celebrates no victory, bewails no loss. It is but a sonnet to his mistress' eyebrow. He sits in a dark bush close beside her, and, with an energy surprising as the sustained magic of the song, he breathes out his dear entreaty and desire. For her alone is the music. From some not distant thicket pour the notes of a rival, whom the strains thrill with jealousy. He stops as if to listen ; the other swain

retorts in a splendid burst; his defiance brings out a clear, melodious, wrathful rejoinder; the other serenader puts his whole fierce little soul into his retort; the wood is alive and ringing with challenge, and passion, and disdain. So rapt is the singer, so drunk with his own wild passion, he pays no heed to noises that at another time might fright him into silence. He is ever one of the least timorous of birds, and to-night, with this business on hand, he is as heedless of the human noisomeness about him as the stars are or the trees.

Ornithologists tell you he sings by day as well, but that his voice is drowned in the roar of waking life. This is true only here and there. In a certain garden I know, he will be perfectly quiet till about eight of the May and the young June evenings, when he will whistle a call or two, and is hushed again till dark. My experience is that he is at his best towards midnight. When the last toss-pot has gone home, and a hush as of death has fallen on brake and cover; when the mystery of the trees is at its deepest, and the sky is like a plain glittering with camp-fires, there is an exquisite and sober joy in traversing the woodland dusks alone save for the instancy of his desire. To describe the song were impossible. Attempts to reduce it to score are foredoomed to failure. No human being who has not heard it could ever so repeat Marco Betton's 'Tiouou, tiouou, tiouou,' and the rest, as to get the faintest conception of it. To hear a

flock of waterfowl flying high and viewless in the dark, with cries that seem born of ice and ocean : that is to catch a true expression of melancholy. A mounting skylark seems to find ecstasy in singing for singing's sake, and to find it all the year through, with but the shortest interlude for moulting. But the nightingale's is only a tale of fiery and concentrated passion. He does not rove like the cuckoo, proclaiming his enjoyment. At the mating season he begins, and he ends when nesting is over. May is the month of months for him. Year after year he comes back to the same grove ; and, listening, you may well believe that the same twig is his perch for hours. Sunlight inspires him not, nor food ; only darkness and desire. If you suck melancholy from his note, be sure it is but the burden of your own sadness you are casting upon him ; and if his effect be one of merriment, then are you revelling in the laughter of your own glad heart.

KNAPPING FLINTS

IN days when the schoolboy, whose practice has been limited to rooks and rabbits, deems a muzzle-loader antediluvian, it is safe to say that, interesting as the making of gun-flints is, the most striking thing about it is that it should continue to exist at all. And yet it is a most flourishing and active industry.

While the latest invention in hammerless breech-loaders hardly contents our English sportsmen, thousands of rude hunters and warriors possess no deadlier weapon than such a flint-lock gun as you may occasionally find rusting in some loft of an old-fashioned farmhouse. The knappers have not for a long time previously been busier than during the last three years, and flints have gone out of England by millions annually. Exportation to Brazil and South America, on which the greatest dependence used to be placed, has decreased, but that to South Africa has grown with its recent development. Yet flint-knapping is less attractive as a survival than because it is an ancient—probably the most ancient—village industry, and is still pursued with the simple tools and by the simple methods used by the forefathers of those engaged in it. Above all, it is a traditional and hereditary calling. Take what branch you may, and it will invariably be found that the craftsman of to-day learned the skill from his father. There is a patriarch of over seventy still to be seen on sunny days hanging about the chalk-pits, though totally unfit to wield the spade or pick. Before the fir-trees were planted that now overshadow some of the white mounds, he remembers coming to help his father and grandsire, while close at hand his son and grandson are at work.

So it is with the rest. The Brandon flint-knappers form a little colony by themselves, differing alike in character and sentiment from the rustics who sur-

round them. For the benefit of those who do not know this pleasant village, it may be as well to say that it stands on the Little Ouse, where that river, gliding over its almost level and weedy bed, passes between Norfolk and Suffolk, on to Downham to join the Great Ouse. Its great rabbit warrens are well known, and it has a whiting and some other small factories ; but from time immemorial flint-pits and knapping-sheds have formed its glory. While a sand mound was being excavated in 1865, a subterranean passage was found at a depth of eighty feet, that long ages ago had apparently been searched for flints. At all events, there was found sticking in one of the sides a strange old pickaxe, made by putting a flint edge on an antler's horn. Very likely it had been used for excavating flint from the soft chalk by the artificers who fashioned arrow-heads for the savages who inhabited ancient Britain, and might have been left there by some prehistoric digger. However, it seems certain that in very remote ages the peculiar value of the flints in the neighbourhood was known and prized. When Canon Greenwell investigated the well-known 'Grimes Graves,' situated in a wood close to the old road leading from Brandon to Swaffham, he found about eighty picks made from the antlers of red deer, which in all probability had been used to get the flint out of the chalk. It would seem, therefore, that the flint-knappers, when they compete as they have often done at exhibitions for a prize given to the

oldest village industry, are very well entitled to succeed. Most of the workmen confess, however, that they are less skilful at their trade than were those workers of remote antiquity. They find it so difficult—so impossible—to imitate the elf arrow that some feel sure it must have been the fairies who made it. ‘Not a single skilled workman in Brandon,’ wrote Mr. James Wyatt more than twenty years ago, ‘has ever succeeded in producing the beautiful conchoidal waves, crimpings, and ripple-work displayed on the surface of tools and weapons found in Scandinavia.’ That is a very mild way of stating the inability of the men of to-day. A simple arrow-head found in one of the Brandon fields is so much beyond their imitation that they say that at the making of it there must have been either witchcraft or instruments that have been lost! But then none of them has (like a well-known practitioner at the Giant’s Causeway) made it the business of his life to make sham arrow-heads. Nor have they any idea that a skilled archæologist, by studying the methods of those Polynesians, Esquimaux, and others who still use flint implements, can with a reindeer’s horn tied to a bit of wood produce a close approach to all but the most ornate of antique weapons. The Brandon knapper’s skill is indubitable, but it is concentrated on two or three strokes which serve to produce the perfectly unadorned gun-flint of modern times. A gun-flint, or strike-alight, is almost the simplest stone implement that can be made, and the knapper,

who is paid by the thousand, cannot afford the time that many ethnologists have given to imitate the craftsmanship and reproduce the tools of primitive man. Regarding the methods by which these were made, the reader may be referred to the 'Ancient Stone Implements, Weapons, and Ornaments of Great Britain,' by Sir John Evans. 'Either bone or stag's horn sets or punches, or else small and hard pebbles,' he says, 'may have been applied at the proper spots upon the surface of the flints, and then been struck by a stone or wooden mallet.' To follow him at present, however, would lead us away from the one little link with the Stone age that we have chosen to examine.

For I am anticipating, and ought to have begun at the quarries, since it must be understood that the flint used is found in large nodules among chalk, and must be excavated before it can be chipped. If we go out on Brandon Heath, we shall see many acres of rough grassland, bordered on one side by a green plantation and on another by a field of wheat. They are dotted all over with grey heaps of chalky earth, showing where generation after generation of men has been digging for flints. Some of the mounds are so old that the dust blown over them by the wind has become a soil for rough grass; and self-sown whins (under which rabbits have their burrows) have thrust up between the lumps. But under the trees, and close up to the corn, the mounds are glittering white, for here the men, even now, are tossing up fresh chalk.

They have to go deep down, for in the soft upper strata the stones are grey and almost worthless, while the valuable black flints are only found in the harder rock underneath. Exposure to the atmosphere, or even proximity to the surface, appears to have the effect of causing the best black flints to lose some of their colour and lustre, and, besides, it deprives them of the moisture without which they are ever so much more difficult to work.

To look at one of the diggers is to imagine that, like certain insects, he has taken on the colour of his environment. Not only are his little cap, his torn old jacket, his trousers, and his heavy boots all as dusky white as the clothes of a miller, but the colour of his complexion is midway between that of chalk and cream. It is by no means an unhealthy hue, for he belongs to a strong and long-lived race, but by living out of the sunlight he has become as blanced as a stalk of celery. And to listen to his talk is to be carried into another world ; for, like all those who live detached and solitary lives, his impressions of the universe are peculiarly his own. The coal-miner is one of a multitude, and his mind is full of strikes, wages, and friendly societies. In his subterranean gallery, with no companion save a boy assistant on the surface, the flint-digger is master and man in one. Politics, labour questions, and votes interest him little. He is not well paid—not much better than a Norfolk farm-servant—but ‘to be your own master is worth three

bob a week,' he says sturdily. His interests all lie in flint and chalk, in pits and burrows, and even his chronology differs from that of other men. 'Since the first pit was opened in the plantation,' 'Since the last break of wheat was taken in'—dates like these are his landmarks. Winter and summer, autumn and spring follow and succeed without affecting him. The gorse flowers beside the chalk-heap, the poppy and blueweed come among the corn, wind and sun ripen the ears of wheat, but seventy feet below the surface there is no change of weather. All that he knows is on sunny days to get his new pit opened, and if the rain comes to dive into his deepest burrow and resume the interrupted task.

He is an inveterate Tory, and by his nature stubbornly opposed to change of every kind. He does not dispute—as how could he?—that the flint might be more easily and expeditiously excavated, but the habit of solitude and independence is so ingrained in him that he continues to work by the old methods, to avoid all sorts of modern improvements, and to carry on his work without associates.

His only tools are a spade and shovel, a pickaxe and a hammer—no engine, no winch, no pulley, not even a ladder. The operations make one think of an unusually intelligent rabbit. Firstly he digs out a square hole to a depth of about six feet, then he burrows to right or left, and from the stage thus made drops another six feet, burrowing and dropping alter-

nately till he is sixty or seventy feet beneath the surface. To realise how much labour this involves it must be remembered that the excavated chalk is shovelled upward from stage to stage by hand. His method of descent is by leaping down this flight of gigantic steps. It is no wonder that few visitors care to follow. People who think nothing of descending a coal-mine shrink from it. You jump to the first stage quite cheerily, for you see where you are going to; at the next the grey landing-place still glimmers as in twilight, but after that the leaps must be taken into a darkness gross as that of Erebus, in blind faith that there must be a platform. When the bottom at last is reached, a faint little flare of candle-light shows the mouth of a tunnel some eighteen feet long. Crawling up this on hands and knees, the jagged white walls hardly visible, you come upon the pitman lying on his side and with his pick trying to loosen the chalk round a heavy nodule of flint. Like many solitary workers, he has a way of talking to himself, and now coaxingly addresses the stone, 'Come away, my beauty—drop down now—that's a good 'un.' Anon he mutters in fury, 'I'll have you, you beast, if the house falls.' But it is a heavy and difficult lump to move. The chalk down here is hard, and his arm cannot get free play, so that there is plenty of time to talk ere it drops noiselessly on the soft grey dust. Often, he says, he has mined down as far as this without discovering a flint, and it is almost his only

grievance that he is paid nothing for sinking the pit. His wages are calculated on the number of 'one-horse jags' or cartloads he can bring to the surface. Occasionally there are accidents. Where there is much sand to be pierced ere the chalk is reached the walls sometimes fall in and make the labour all in vain. Life is seldom endangered, however, though men at times have been crippled by being too venturesome. He likes the work for its independence and because it was his father's trade, and he could not endure regular hours or a timekeeper. As to loneliness, he does not know what it means. But here he stops with a shout of triumph, for down the flint has come at last. Now he must drag it to the opening of the gallery, where, if he cannot by raising it on his head and jerking with neck, shoulders, and arms toss it up on the landing-place, he will crack it with a hammer and raise the fragments. Outside the chalk has formed a white encrustation, but the heart is as black as ebony, for, as he puts it, 'floor 'uns be the best, wall 'uns the second best, top 'uns the worst of all.' Why that should be so he never asks. Sartin' sure the chalk has been made by water, for he has found cockle-shells and fishes and little sarpent things in it ; but, like Topsy, the flint growed there.

I doubt if there is any harder toil than his in existence. Working in a 'burrow'—that is to say, in a gallery three feet high—and with a pickaxe endeavouring to loosen the chalk round a little crag of flint.

is extremely irksome ; but the only reliefs to it consist of digging and of throwing up the lumps from stage to stage. Except for his iron tools, he is no better off than the first savage who dug out a pit ; his results come directly from the exercise of his muscle ; he owes nothing whatever to science.

It is more difficult to get out of the pit than it was to get in. Little footholds have been cut in the chalky sides, and by their aid one has to scale the great ladder as best one can. On the top you will be glad to sit and philosophise a little on the detached and quiet existence of the human rabbit who is burrowing down below. The agricultural labourer who complains that the country is so grossly dull leads a wild and stirring life in comparison with the flint-digger, who in solitude and perpetual twilight pursues his craft ; and yet I think the latter is the happier and more contented of the two.

The second part of the work is done under vastly different circumstances. In the knapping-shed to which the flints are carted some half-dozen men all sit and work together, or rather in twos, for it is a trade of partnership. The typical knapper is a deft pale-faced little man, usually with several bits of sticking-plaster disfiguring his countenance ; for when the flint is sparkling under his hammer ever and anon a tiny chip takes him on the nose, or the cheek, or the eyeball. One whose business it is to break up the blocks of flint sits beside a heap of them on a three-

legged stool. His right leg, from the knee up to the thigh, is covered with a heavy guard of thick coarse leather. Looking at him, I have often thought with wonder on a certain passage in Mr. Blackmore's most famous novel. It is where John Ridd breaks the great boulder in the gold mine. 'Then I swung me on high to the swing of the sledge,' says he, 'as a thresher bends back to the rise of his flail, and with all my power descending delivered the ponderous onset.' But the stone-breakers I have known would not dream of accomplishing that feat by main strength, and certainly the flint-knapper does not attempt it. He takes his lump of flint gently on his knee, and turns it over and over, to find out, as he says, where his hammer will take hold; then, with what is a sharp well-directed tap rather than a downright blow, he splits it in two. Seldom indeed is it necessary to strike twice. But the next operation is a still more wonderful performance with the hammer. Taking a manageable fragment in his lap, and catching the nature of its seams and angles with a single glance, he with his light flaking hammer pares off slice after slice in less time than it takes to tell. Every knock at a corner brings away a piece of flint in shape almost identical with that of razor-shells found at the seaside. The edges are like those of a knife, and one side has a surface almost as smooth as glass. On the other he has calculated to get two long ridges. To look at the flakes it would appear as though the piece of rock had been

made of thin layers that the workman has parted. Anyone placing three gun-flints in a row with the smooth side downwards will obtain a fairly accurate idea of the shape. But there are knots, and twists, and seams, and turns, in the grain that produce a great variety in the peelings. To get them off like that is a triumph of manual skill that cannot be achieved except by those who have practised it a long time. Flint-cores, such as are left by the knapper when his flaking is done, have been found in circumstances that seem to point to their survival from the Stone age.

The second operator sits with a tubful of flakes at his elbow, a tiny steel anvil three or four inches long in front of him, and a peculiar hammer in his hand. In shape it is something like a miniature pick, only its chisel-like face is nearly two inches long. Years of practice have enabled him, when he takes a flint-peeling in his hand, to decide instantaneously what can be made of it. The exporter of gun-flints desires to have many different kinds to suit the various sorts of weapons. There are in all twenty-three different kinds of flint made, but it requires some ingenuity to stretch them out so far. For instance, to make up the list you have grey muskets and black muskets, where difference is not at all in the workmanship but in the alleged quality of the flint. Setting aside minor kinds, the main classes of flint are for the common gun, the pocket and horse pistols, the musket,

rifle, and carbine. From the narrow point of his flake the workman chips a diminutive flint for a pocket-pistol, though not so many of these are required as of a larger size for horse-pistols. But the flints most in request are the neat and well-shaped ones used for rifles, and the biggest of all required for carbines. There is also a continuous, though not a very considerable, demand for strike-a-lights, meant for the use of travellers and sportsmen who have had experience of damp matches. As each of these has its own shape and size, which must be accurately reproduced, it will be seen that the knapper at the anvil has a task demanding both skill and judgment. Yet its execution has become so much a habit with him that he talks and chips away as if by instinct. At every sharp pop down drops a gun-flint, which he takes in his hand and lets the hammer play round till the sharp edges are blunted and the size made exactly what is required. The speed at which he works may be inferred from the fact that each man calculates to turn out on an average three thousand a day. In time of pressure a knapper has been known—by commencing very early in the morning and working to a late hour at night—to make nine thousand. But that is deemed an extraordinary and prodigious day's work. The employers as well as the men reckon that, taking all the year round, a third of that number represents the output of a man. This means about twelve thousand a week, for it is an old custom in the

trade to make Saturday and Monday holidays ; the former is devoted to play, and the latter is given up to tool-sharpening. Knapping cannot be done unless the hammers are in perfect order, and it is said that the only smiths who can put them right are a few in the neighbourhood of Brandon, who have done the work from infancy, and know to a nicety the face and temper required. It is very difficult to calculate the gross number of gun-flints made annually, as the work is in more hands than one, but in all England there are certainly not thirty men who can shape a flint. Business used to fluctuate very much, and in dull times some of the operatives were obliged to seek employment elsewhere. From half-a-dozen to a dozen knappers have constant work, however, and while they do not make fewer than four millions annually, they must be very busy to make eight. Brandon is the chief but not the only seat of the manufacture. Gun-flints are still made in small quantities at Malaga, for example, and specimens are to be seen in the British Museum.

I fear that the figures afford an insecure basis for calculating the number of flint guns still in use. Nobody has been able to tell me how long a flint will serve, and although my earliest firearm was an antique horse-pistol that had never known a percussion cap, my experience is not worth much. Firstly, my allowance of powder being strictly limited, made me careful not to waste any shots, so that the water-voles

at which I practised had to be well out on the green willow twigs ere I fired ; and secondly, as flints were difficult to obtain, I had all a boy's patience and ingenuity in exposing first one edge to the hammer, then another. Moreover, the number of miss-fires would have exhausted the patience of any man shooting for his life or his dinner. After thirty or forty shots, however, it is probable that a gun-flint is no longer to be depended upon.

On being split up, the flint occasionally shows an unexpected colour, and, indeed, the figures shown in this process, though they must have been accidentally produced, are sometimes marvellous. There is one in the possession of a workman now in which a mother suckling her child is shown with a fidelity and distinctness no draughtsman could surpass. But the knapper does not regard these colours with the eyes of an æsthete. He knows that those who barter the flints with the natives find that the pure black are invariably the most highly prized, and accordingly he has to accept a very much smaller price for those of a grey tint. Many of these are probably made into strike-a-lights and never used for guns at all. Yet, when all is said, the number of gun-flints made is sufficiently large to surprise the new generation of English sportsmen, who are growing up unfamiliar with any but breech-loading guns.

Perhaps I may be allowed to conclude this paper with the narration of a little incident that made me

laugh less at the flint-knappers in particular than at human nature in general. Some of them were bewailing their small profits. Except that they worked under cover, said one, they were not better off than the farm labourers. 'Well,' I said, jestingly, 'you can, at all events, strike to get your wages up.' But the spokesman shook his head gravely. 'There were so many in the trade,' he replied, '*you could never get them to agree!*'

S U M M E R



THE PLEASURES OF JUNE

I

NEVER do fiery streets and hot, flashing glass, and the noises and odours of town, awake a deeper loathing than in early June, when the fields, coloured and cool, and tuneful, 'half pranked with Spring, with summer half imbrowned,' are commanding rather than inviting our visitation. Life has once more taken full possession of the world, so that to watch its conquering advance is happiness enough for that fortunate and forgetful mortal who can ring down a curtain on the past, and, wasting no speculation on the future, make the present an interlude between them. But how hard to attain this frame of mind! How rare the capacity to be absolutely idle! Sitting under the loose and melancholy boughs of an elm, in a green and white and golden meadow, hard by a pond of water-lily blooms and floating leaves, you shall seek

in vain to conjure your familiars away. Ambition, intrigue, passion, the sorrowful counterfeits of pleasure are wicked necromancers who blur the picture by their black and magical arts, and so poison your senses that Mayfair, or Fleet Street, or the Stock Exchange shall seem to take its place. Yet if you but knew it, each fleeting minute would fain lay its little load of joy at your feet, and no scheming may ensure that the minutes of to-morrow will be so laden. Every sound proclaims that the life around and about you is utterly absorbed in the enjoyment of being. The cuckoo shouts it as he flies; the ringdove murmurs it from his perch among the twinkling beech leaves; from a million throats up in the clouds and down on the briar bush the burden is poured. Creation is at flood. The swallows skimming low over the corn-fields, the leverets whose silky ears just top the green young stalks, the landrail croaking from the nettles, the tiny water-voles out on the willow twigs where they lean across the water—whatever lives and moves is happy now or will never be happy at all.

So, too, is he who loves nature for herself alone; who with no call to study or observe, innocent of any ambition to turn his pleasure into text-books, is content to lounge, and saunter, and dream in sunshine and shadow, watching the grass grow and hearing the birds sing. Where the rivulet has fretted a channel between two breaks of wheat is a stone, over-arched with yellow broom, and there, at highest noon, secluded

from the world, he need see nothing but the wren fluttering in and out of her nest below the bank, hear nothing but the song that is no song of the water bickering over the gravel and sliding away among flags and ferns. He will learn nothing, and gain nothing, at least nothing measurable in utilitarian scales ; yet he shall assimilate the stuff of many exquisite memories. Nature is a whimsical mistress. She bursts headlong into the presence of minds pre-occupied with heroic endeavour, she delights in visiting vacancy, but for them that search for her clamantly—all these she avoids. If the brookside grow tedious, the woods can never pall, and by woods are meant neither strips of plantation which you may look right through, nor newly-planted carefully tended ornamental forestings, but old and wild and neglected woodlands where ‘ cool mosses deep ’ are flowering in the vividest hues, and fallen boles rot undisturbed, and the briar-rose clambers up the pine, and the natural thicket is hedged with rank ferns. Not yet is the foliage so thick but the sun may carpet the grass with a pattern of leaves of light in some shady corner of an open glade. To hearken to the cry of breeding pheasants ; or watch the brown snake glide out to bask him in the heat ; or fall into reverie, and let your life merge in the life of grass, and leaf, and tree—that is another unforgettable experience, another imperishable gift of June.

Further afield are resting places still more

beautiful. The flying gold of autumn is not comparable to the purer hue of early summer. What white can equal the white of a tall hawthorn hedge in bloom? And none has ever caught, or ever will catch, in words the splendour of such miles upon miles of flowering gorse as you may still see in the north of England, where the fiery sight is rounded by the blue and white of a sunny sea. From the hill slope you may count the white sails (white as the sea-mew's wings), and the black funnels with their trains of smoke. But to landward there is a deep and fertile valley where the half-grown grass gleams like metal in the wind, and great trees, green-mantled solitaires, dose in the sunshine; by sedgy margins and banks blue with speedwell, a sleepy river flows through pasture and tilth. At daybreak, when the long shadows lie on every quiet pool, and the scuts of the rabbits show white as they dart through the dewy corn, the very otter-hunter, whose dogs are making merry music down the water, will stop to gladden his eye with the scene. But in the dusk of night it takes on a new and perhaps a more exquisite beauty. The dor-hawk skims the moor with his monotonous churrurr-ing; the bat is hawking and flying in his silent mysterious way; the lights of human life are few, and feeble, and remote; and ere the moon come out, sparkling on the water and brightening the wold, you shall keep your vigil alone in a world of dreams.

II

TO most of us the Highlands seem changeless—to wear the same face all the months round. So many things have to be done, and the demands on time by political, professional, and other duties are so varied and incessant, that only a trip a year is possible, and for many a grouse-shooter and deer-stalker the Highlands exist but as stretches of heather past its first bloom, and lying russet under a grey autumnal sky. Who, indeed, shall tell us what they are like in winter, when the snowy Bens look down on vacant lodge and empty caravanserai and half-dispeopled clachan? Thus, too, the angler returning to his accustomed lochs and streams in April and May, when after making valley and lowland green, the Spring lags slowly up these heights, remembers them by the everlasting bleakness of the hills, their bare cold copses, and those chilling winds and frozen rains that numb the fingers till they are past managing a reel, and lend a lasting and peculiar charm to the glow of the tavern ingle. To both shooter and fisherman the June Highlands are an unknown land. And the leafy month is also well-nigh sacred from that common and gregarious tourist who in July and August so often makes a seat in the coach, a bed at the hotel, or a walk unvulgarised and unprofaned, the rankest impossibility.

It is the quiet Rambler for rambling's sake that is

aptest to make the experiment here analysed, and in the heart of the season he reminds you of nothing so much as a nervous elderly gentleman seeking rest by a 'byke' of wasps. Does he compose himself to recline on the turf? There in horrible proximity the little beasts are passing out and in, and he flees the accursed nook in terror. Does he sit him down on a limb of the fallen willow? Lo! their buzzing is in his ear before he has had time to mop his brow with his bandanna. Peace there is none for him unless he shake off the dust from his feet and depart the place. Even so the contemplative tourist in summer. He sits him vacant by the Teith, well pleased to feed his vacancy upon the song of the water; but he starts in fury and dismay to learn from the 'Saxon, I am Roderick Dhu!' of some knickerbockered monster that here is Coil-an-Togle Ford. Or among the green-embowered ruins of Menteith he will hold himself thrice happily unfriended and remote, when lo! there overtakes him like a flood the odious and inevitable trip in all its obscene garniture of lemonade-bottles, sandwiches, concertinas, flutes, sweethearts, slang, canorous reminiscences of the 'alls. The leafage rings with 'Two Lovely Black Eyes,' or 'Ta-ra-ra-,' and the lonely burnsidcs blush with blazers and dreadful things, chimeras dire in the way of women's hats. And if, in search of solitude by Loch Ard, or on the slopes of Ben Ledi, or where the blue waters of Loch Katrine splash gently on the Silver Strand, he curse

Sir Walter and the Clan Macgregor bodily, and with them every poet, cattle-thief, cateran, and writer of romance that has cast what the excited Cockney calls 'a glamour' over haunts once innocent and wild, his maledictions are light in comparison to those he vents on hostelries where balmy sleep at night and decent food by day are both exorbitantly charged for, and are both out of the question. If he be wise he will next year steal a march upon his plagues and to the Highlands in June.

The result is like to be a curious blend of pleasure and disappointment. In the moon wherein I experimented there was a minimum of the unpleasing. The winter had been so genial and was followed by a gush of such 'ethereal mildness,' that you have to go back many seasons for a June more prodigal of blossom. The hawthorn, which in the neighbourhood of London had flowered and gone, was still blanching copse and thicket, still gleaming from between green firs on the outlying Highland knolls, and that in such profusion as would be a prophecy of avalanche if there were truth at all in 'mony haws mony snaws.' If Linnæus, who fell down on his knees and thanked God for the golden gorse, had viewed the river valleys and the low hills, magnificent almost beyond example in their wealth of whin and broom, he would have been kneeling all day long. But it was only on the way into the heart of the Highlands that these heartening and enchanting visions were possible, for they belong to

the skirts of the mountains, the march-land between hill and plain. If you looked down from the shoulder of Ben Venue upon Loch Achray and the woods that slope from it, and up the valley to Loch Katrine and down to Vennachar, you found them few and wide apart. There was scarce a hawthorn, scarce a whin-bush to be seen. The clump from which the cuckoo was calling his whereabouts was of light and brilliant green, but, apart from its leafage, the great line of Bens was sombre and bleak, for the young sprouts of heather had not yet covered last year's witherings. On the marshy land, wherever the heavy grey curlew called and flew, the dead ferns made a mass of bright red-brown, with the new fronds springing here and there, and touching it with glints of palest green. Yet, now if ever is the time to understand and share Sir Walter's enthusiasm for the Trossachs. In late summer it is not easy to do so : firstly, because of that gush of touring humanity from which escape is well-nigh impossible, and against which the human mind revolts ; and secondly, because the thick and heavy foliage and the dense undergrowth are too much for the good effects of light and shade. But in June, when the lady of the wood puts on the light and flitting dress that veils without dissembling her form, when the first lustre of the silver fir can only be paralleled by the metallic gleam seen now and then on a living animal, and when the road through the pass winds not among a plump unbroken

mass of green, but over broken ground whose contours are full in view and within eyeshot of mountain streams that will presently be lost, then—well! then

The stag at eve had drunk his fill
Where danced the moon on Monan's rill

and all the rest of it. That is your frame of mind as long as it keeps fair, while in rainy weather you seem to have been flung back into winter. Whether it be that a Highland wind over lake and hills blows keener than another, or that the Highland hotels are built specially for draughts, certain it is that in the June Highlands you may be extraordinarily uncomfortable. And neither umbrella, mackintosh, nor any wrappage is proof against a Highland rain. To come in cold and wet is to realise that the tavern is not all your fancy painted. Either the servants are not yet in for the season, or they have failed to learn their duties; for dinner is dogged by indigestion, and not even the promise of a vail will rouse the waiters' intelligence. And cold and rheumatism and influenza are fellow-guests, and sit beside you at the feast.

Yet if these be braved with impunity, the Highlands in rain offer brave compensation for a wetting. That jovial summer Cockney who talks of Stronashlasher, and offers with a pint of beer and a lemonade-bottle to produce you a better cascade than is at Inversnaid, might with profit study the water now. Had he stood by Loch Katrine on a rainy day and heard the thunder, deafening as Niagara's, of the falls.

of the great Ben that rises from its shores, and whose monstrous side shows scarce a vein of white in fine weather ; were he to look on the distant mountains streaked and scarred with lines of foam, and could he be got to realise from the look of the swollen burns hard by what it all signifies, he would be—as himself might put it—‘pretty tolerably flummoxed.’ It is worth a man’s while to walk in a rainstorm from the Clachan of Aberfoyle to the Trossachs merely to see the fury of the streams near by and the beauty of those afar. But the privilege is one for the few.

At this time sporadic tourists will always be coaching it from place to place ; but none lingers as he goes, firstly because there is no sport, and secondly because the wet hills are past climbing, and even the pleasant bridlepaths impassable. Only he that loves the heights without heather—he that delights in the fresh hues of early summer and is not dismayed by bad cookery nor afraid of damp—will ‘taste’ the June Highlands as he ought.

III

THERE are two places where I love to sit and moralise on human life. One is the corner of an ancient and crowded village graveyard that might have suggested the *Elegy* to Gray, the other a boulder amid the bracken of a hillside. That among the tombs is of the two the more cheerful resting-place, although it has not yet become like a town cemetery, whither

dressy girls come with their sweethearts and flirt beside the dead. But it is to no sorrowful tune that the summer wind rustles the ivy on the church wall, and the leaves of the great elm, and the foliage of the dark yews that the sunshine forces out of mourning. The flowers on a few well-tended graves blow happily as in a garden, yet not more happily than the rank grass that shoots lustily upwards and waves and nods over the unheadstoned mounds, where are buried, says the poet, not only the bodies of men, but withered hearts, and crushed genius, and foiled ambition : the wild and strong-winged birds that have beaten themselves to death against the prison bars of poverty. If such things were not, the churchyard would not be so full of interest. I could never feel that it is sad. It is not death, but life, that is tragic ; and if in fancy I conjure from these tombs the faces of their sleeping tenants, it is not as troubled complaining ghosts they come : though one at least I know who, albeit dowered with full capacity for living, was not permitted so much as to taste of life—who, like an athlete debarred from competition by lack of entrance money, was by the sordid accident of want compelled to stand aside. There is no active, sympathetic anxiety now to interfere with the calm amusement of readjusting his destiny. The dead are plastic stuff for the fancy to work upon.

It is more difficult to follow out any cheerful train of thought on the hillside, even when the valley is

lovely enough to please a painter or inspire a poet. Nature has donned the beautiful dress of early summer. The light cloud-shadows play on a landscape of hedged and cultivated fields ; they darken the ripple of the stream ; they deepen the whin's gold into bronze ; they cast a transitory gloom on gleaming fields of unmown grass and green young corn ; they rest for a moment on men and women toiling on the bare soil, and fly over thatched hamlet and red-tiled steading ; they wander across the purple moorland, and are lost at last beyond the glittering waves that wash the edge of the land. When they have passed woodland and hill, the sleeping trees, the glancing river, and the distant sea combine into an exquisite smile, and the soft and fitful breeze ever more sweetly croons its old-world rhyme to the grass and fern.

It is a witch or a goddess that gazes up from the outstretched country. Her look of laughter, her voice and fragrance declare it ; and perhaps, like Mr. Andrew Lang's goddess, what he seeks in her countenance she shows to every wooer. One discovers a well-spring of joy and worships a beneficent Deity ; another shudders at a monster ' red in tooth and claw ' creating only to destroy ; but a third rests in her ferny lap, and listening to the bees humming their way from hill to plain, and watching the hawk hovering above a hay-field and the butterflies fluttering their aërial love-flight in the sunshine, loses thought and memory, and shares, or fancies he shares, the still happiness of

the sprouting heather-sprig beside him and the growing crops below. For him the exceeding splendour of the earth and its life is all-sufficing ; if he have a wish it is only that enchantment may fix them for ever in their relative positions ; his dread arises from the transience of pleasure. A spell is upon him. The labouring men are but ' figures in the landscape ' without sorrow or story ; the hawk drops like an arrow on his harmless victim and awakens no thought of cruelty ; the shy hill-rabbit pushes her silky ears above the young fern and excites his envy, for in admiration of her pretty attitude he forgets the terrors and the perils of which it speaks. For him the smile of the fields is one of intense and unalloyed love. But how long will the magic endure ?

Long ago I used to look on the same scene with a friend whose dust may now be blowing in the white cloud hurrying past gig and lime-cart on the road across the moor. I do not complain that the fields have called him back, but why was pain heaped so heavily on the gentlest and most loving of creatures ? It is no longer possible to regard this earth as a mere picture or a sort of concert-room. These are not lay figures in the fields. Though drugged with the anæsthetics, labour and care, till they have almost ceased to feel, or aspire, or think, still their movements are not quite automatic : each has his story and his sorrow. Leaves burgeon, and blow, and wither ; crops are sown, and ripen, and fall ; the wild creatures are born, and

generate, and die ; yet every summer day the same imperturbable smile plays on field, and moor, and sky. The fitful gleam of the fields departs and returns again. It has been seen for centuries from this hilltop, looking down wherefrom the figures in the landscape have been to each successive spectator as much alike as this year's and last year's oak-leaves. Yet decay has been busier than growth to torture and destroy. If every living thing in this prodigal display were multiplied by the number of the countless years the earth has endured, the result would still not equal the number of those vanquished by death.

The hours used to slip past rapidly here ; for the barley and oat fields faded away, and the road showing white patches between the wayside elms, and the inhabited hamlets, and the smokeless and ivied ruins. In place of them grew a golden territory of dream. But it is not golden now, for it is built not in the future but the past, and it is peopled not as of old with glorified pictures of the living but with spectres of the dead. At least that is how I try to explain the element of sadness that has replaced the old exhilaration from the shining and fertile fields. If I think of them as changeless, it is as a contrast with the evanescence engraven on all else ; and Nature's smile seems one of ironic pity for the generations of men who, like the troops of birds, and beasts, and flowers, make a momentary appearance on the stage, but, unlike these, are conscious of transitoriness, and have sufficient

knowledge to regret. A sorceress, looking on for ages at a monotonous repetition of the tragi-comedy of the appearance and disappearance of life, would find a last refuge in irony. It is pitilessness in a mask of sympathy. Nature, in fact, acts the polite worldling to her friends. She is a consoler as long as you do not doubt her sincerity, and when that moment comes she carries her easy and graceful and superficial smile to others.

So when I wish to be cheerful I hie me down from the mountain-top to the snug graveyard that nestles in the valley. There Nature, Fate, Destiny, whatever you like to call her, has done her worst. The lives of them that lie there have been lived and are done with. But they are not destroyed. Having once been admitted into the kingdom of Time they can never again be excluded. If I do not know the personalities of the sleepers, it is at least open to me to fit them from imagination, and to make them live their lives once more in a reconstructed world. To the fancy of a dreamer a village churchyard is as rich a storehouse of materials as the annals of history. And no sorrow need mingle with one's meditations here, for the place is purged alike of fear and suffering. Nature's irony is apparent only when she is decked in holiday robes, and her soft unceasing voice talks love, and her laughter seems to rest on all the fields.

WILD LIFE IN LONDON

THE Londoner's affection for wild things is one of the most touching features of his character, but it is altogether different from the countryman's. Often it is horribly cruel. Whoever has explored a residential slum must have pitied, almost as much as the wretched children, the still more wretched wild birds seeking to fleet their confinement with delirious music. Larks of smoky hue and bedraggled feather pour forth their strains of unpremeditated art from cages wherein is scarce room to turn ; a tricky siskin lifts his tiny can of food and water next door to a squirrel which is bringing on a galloping consumption by the furious ardour with which he turns his wheel for lack of aught else to do ; chaffinch, and linnet, and starling, thrush, and blackbird chirp and sing with a Mark Tapleyism more distressing than silence. In a moorland cottage or a quiet hamlet you may see the same species almost as closely cabined, yet as merry as if they had never known delightful liberty. The word of the riddle explains how very much wild creatures are slaves to habit. The urban bird-catcher gets the most of his birds in the dead of winter. They are old, and they can never be anything but wild. It is hard to understand how even in the slums (but you find them in places which are not slums at all) the torture of captivity should be their owner's joy. It would be

humané to wring their necks and humane to make the capture of them penal. Now, the country urchin who fills his father's aviary is cruel in a very different fashion. He wages war with everything that flies or runs. He goes forth on his rambles armed with a dry bough for the field-mouse that will dart across his path through the plantation, for the weasel he hopes to see peeping from out the nettles, for the vole in the willows by the brook. His pockets are crammed with missiles for any and every bird. The lark's music will insure him no immunity should he light for a moment on the dry dyke; the guileful tomtit, fluttering and tumbling to wile the young hunter from her nest, is as like as not to tempt forth a stone that will make her a cripple in earnest; if two robins, as they often will do, get squabbling under the elms, if a patrol of sparrows make a free shindy of it, his glory and delight it is to lay the dirdum in his well-known pleasant and fatal way. But it is the mistake of 'dicky-bird' sentimentalists to suppose that he is therefore a common savage. On the contrary, it is only a natural outcome of the hunting instinct; and as long as the sparrow hawks at the bee, and the robin waits for the spider, and the rat murders the mouse, and the stoat creeps on the leveret, it does not seem that any of them have just cause of complaint.

But let this same boy light on a nest of birds or squirrels, and he straightway develops a tenderness

almost motherly. He thrusts his hand into the dray, and though the young rodents make their sharp teeth meet in his flesh he will bear no malice, but pack them carefully in his pocket, and, dividing the brood among his playmates, rear one for himself so lovingly that the creature plays in freedom in the garden or on the thatch till Spring brings vain and amatorious thoughts, and off he goes to the thronged and secret wood. As for his birds, he takes them callow and unfeathered, when you would think that twelve hours out of their mother's care would certainly mean death by starvation ; yet the way he will bring them up by hand is well-nigh miraculous. He has often watched the process of feeding—of the cushat for example, and he imitates it exactly : he fills his mouth with bruised corn or peas, he takes the gobbet's beak within it, he so transfers the food that his nursling fattens and grows amain and loves him as though he were feathered. For smaller birds—as linnets and finches—he makes him a little pointed stick, which he dips in a mixture of wild seeds, softened crumbs, or oatmeal and water ; and with the tiniest morsels he sustains and brings to good a gaping and imperious bird-baby that will presently remind you of Lesbia's sparrow—'*quem plus illa oculis suis amabat.*'

Thus in the country free birds are very wild, and pets are very tame. The opposite is the case in London. Most of the caged birds are shamefully

wild, while the unconfined are almost distressingly domesticated. In Hyde Park, for instance, is a quaint and curious angle. It is not at all sequestered, for it is within a stone's-throw of Rotten Row and a near neighbour to the Serpentine. The true Cockney sees nothing wonderful in it. Here are pigeons; but so there are at St. Paul's and the British Museum, where they are so tame you can scarce help trampling on them. Yes, but these are true wood-pigeons, and they fill the countryman with amazement. Go into the fields and try to get within gunshot of one, and you will know what it is to stalk the shyest and the wariest of British birds. But these are as tame as the tenants of a dovecot. Crumble a biscuit, and—if you stand still, and don't let them catch your eye—they will come close up, peck a morsel from your boot, run between your legs, and be more confident than the very sparrows—the sparrows here so impudent! The hour is of little consequence. Just when it is nesting time, the hens sit on the eggs all night, and take an hour to themselves at dusk, when you shall hardly catch sight of a male bird's finer burnish and hear his thrilling note. But at other times he courts, and fights, and coos on the grass or among the leafy trees as happily as in a Highland forest. Yet the only magic by which his wildness has been subdued consists in an abundance of food and a great immunity from disturbance (not perfect immunity, for White-chapel has raided the nests more than once), quite

contented, for neither the dark ancients nor the brown youngsters attempt to fly away. Thus the lounge in Hyde Park has vastly superior opportunities of studying the creature's habits to those of naturalists living in the woods.

And the ring-dove is only one of many wild things tamed. Between the road and the close-shaven grass, in the centre of the nook, is a strip of water bordered with sedge and water-flowers. Rabbits, not of any of the house breeds, steal forth fearlessly on the lawn and amuse themselves in public. Here a doe—a doe with a litter of five—is cropping the herbage as industriously as Mr. Gladstone devours post-cards; there a few frolicsome young ones are skipping and playing; while two others (deep in love) are making chase of each other with long deliberate hops, their noses low and their scuts high. Elsewhere you would see them at the slightest noise standing up prettily on their hind legs to listen, or hear them stamping with alarm; but here the world looks on, and dogs of all shapes and sizes and ferocities trot by, and the little folk go about their business as if their sense of fear were atrophied. So it is with the wild duck. Who that has shot the delicious mallard and contrasted him with his waddling brother of the farmyard could imagine him bringing his agile flappers—how mallard *do* run, and how unlike running they are!—up to the railings to feast on bread-crumbs from your hand? His plumage, his voice, his flight between his feeding-

ground and the Serpentine, proclaim his wildness loudly, but he is rapidly acquiring the true duck-pond habit. While you are looking at him, little moorchicks are playing at the water edge, and their long-legged mother goes darting out of one corner of the sedge and in at another, while on a bit of wood in the middle of the water the cock bird sits preening his feathers with his bright bill as secure as the mallard or the queest. There is many a country face among the watchers, for to them aweary of London to see these dear familiars is almost to revisit the woods and streams of earlier years.

RABBITS

RABBIT-SHOOTING suits all sorts and conditions of men. After the rookery, the warren ; you begin with rooks, and you go on to bunny. Nor does the veteran disdain it either ; a day in a well-stocked warren is not wholly beneath comparison with a quest in the heather. But he who likes it best of all is perhaps the man who, without being an infatuated sportsman, yet loves—for health's sake, or a taste for the country, or some lazy, hazy inclination—to live a great deal in the full air. One reason for this is that it is open all the year. There is no close time ; and no such agitation as was made in favour of the hare has ever been raised for one, the truth being that nothing of the kind is needed. Despite the Ground Game Act

and the multiplication of poachers, rabbits never were more plentiful than now. The creature seems to benefit by being thinned out to the verge of extermination. However this be, it is certain that nothing tends to disease more than overcrowding, which means the fouling of the grass. His prolific quality enables him to re-stock in a single season a covert which has been trapped and wired even to apparent depopulation. It thus happens that the only season when there is any difficulty in getting him is in the wintry months before seed-time. By then ferret, weather, and gun have done their work, and the fields are bare and without cover. But on fine days even then spaniel or terrier will set him up from the withered grass at the hedge-roots, or from the brushwood of a plantation.

Undoubtedly, of all the forms of rabbit-shooting the liveliest is that with ferrets, and even that is not to be well done without a considerable knowledge of their habits. It is said they bolt freely on moonlight nights, and I knew an old poacher who on these did all his work. He would slink away up the hillside to the woods an hour or so after dusk with his little dog Nellie, which he used exclusively as a watch, her low growl telling him whenever anybody was by ; and with a net on each bolt-hole and his white ferret hard at work in the burrow, he would seat himself on a log or stone patient and vigilant, and (like Mr. Browning's *Artemis*) 'await in fitting silence the event' ! But, as a rule, rabbits never bolt well after

mid-day, and the best sport is to be got between ten and twelve. You soon get to know the holes from which they start most readily—the best being usually those which open on a steep bank, the worse those which are mined into a level meadow. In the latter the ferret often drives the rabbits into a corner from which there is no exit, while in the former he chases them from chamber to chamber into the open. There is much variety in rabbits. One flies out like a shot, and makes direct for another burrow or covert; the next stops short and sits down on his front doorstep (as it were) to consider whether he shall go back or make a rush for it. If they come freely the shooting is just difficult enough to be interesting. Not only does the rabbit offer a smaller target than the hare, but he has a jerky up-and-down run, and his earths are commonly neighboured with brushwood and other cover into which he may, and sometimes does, escape. Besides, it is usual for one gun to look after a number of openings, all of which you must closely watch, so as to knock the quarry over as he slips rapidly from one refuge to another. As a rule you have with you a fast terrier or a small retriever, trained not to touch the ferrets, but fast enough to bring up a wounded rabbit. It is common enough for ferrets, even the most expensive and carefully trained, to ‘lie in,’ for, as every rabbit-shooter knows, it is a trick that is not too mean for the best of them. Unmuzzled, too, they gorge themselves with rabbit, and when they are

muzzled—and then in the opinion of many they do not work so briskly—they will sometimes coil up and go to sleep. To rouse them it is not always enough to hold a dead rabbit at the mouth of the hole and squeak like one in trouble ; the keeper perforce must wake them up with a charge of powder or dig them out. When one is lost he does not seem to wander far ; and he will soon be returned if the ploughman (who is pretty certain to find him hunting for himself along a hedgerow) be not tempted to put him in his pocket and say nothing about him.

To that sportsman who is not overweeningly anxious to make a big bag, the pleasantest rabbit-shooting is found in a stroll over a big estate, than which there is nothing more enjoyable. A very little experience teaches you when and where to go. Rabbits, like other wild things, have their regular meal-times ; you may smoke a good many pipes under a favourite tree at noon and see nothing. All is perfectly still ; not a wing in the air, not a rustle in the undergrowth. Then, at last, a wood-pigeon flies over from one great wood to another, and is followed by several friends, crows and jackdaws begin to give voice and be busy ; on the stream the trout start rising, and dimple the water ; and hist ! that little dark object—unobserved before in the shooting corn or the long grass—is a rabbit who has stolen out of his burrow, and whose ear-tips alone are visible as, half-suspicious of a hostile presence, he sits up to listen. If you keep perfectly still and don't

look directly at him (for he is quick to catch your eye) down he'll go, and soon will he be joined in his feed by others. One meal is taken in the early morning, another at four, and a third about dusk ; that is speaking roughly, of course, for where rabbits are plentiful they are popping in and out all day. The extent of their wanderings largely depends upon the weather. After storm or heavy rain you may walk the rough meadows, or beat bracken and gorse for them in vain ; while in a windy evening, when they are not so quick to hear or scent danger, they are easily stalked indeed. In some respects the rabbit is like the ostrich. He does not exactly bury his head in the sand ; but if you take him by surprise in the middle of a field, his one idea of concealment is to stretch full length on the ground, his ears thrown back, and with nothing to differentiate him from a big grey stone except his eyes, in which it is impossible to mistake the look of pain and alarm. But, as you near him from the direction of his home, he screws himself about for flight. If he is allowed to make for his burrow, he does not go off in a direct line, but follows the twists and turnings of his 'run,' for the field is all laid out in rabbit roads, and when he is driven out of them he seems lost. The poacher and the gamekeeper note these runs with equal care, for the loop of wire with which so many rabbits are taken is so placed as to hang over the new-trod way. The rabbit is not very intelligent. Believing himself hidden in a tuft of

grass or a whin-bush, he will lie there till you pick him up or your dog saves you the trouble. Turned out of a sack at a coursing match, he will sometimes cower down in exactly the same way. He is extremely susceptible to fear, and seems occasionally to get literally frightened out of his wits. I have discharged a gun over the head of a rabbit within a couple of paces of his hole, and he has allowed himself to be taken up in a paralysis of terror. What happens when he is hunted by the weasel, the stoat, or the ferret is pretty much the same : he sits stupefied as a mouse does after it has been held unharmed in the grip of a cat. The approach of death operates upon him like an anæsthetic ; instead of taking a line across country to some of the distant haunts where he has gone a-courting on moonlight nights, he potters about the neighbourhood where he was started ; and the slow but devilish weasel will follow him from burrow to burrow, nor turn aside for any of his brothers till he has brought him down.

During the past few years the depreciation in land and the difficulty of letting to advantage have obliged a number of owners to turn their attention to rabbits as an industry. Now, it is easy to keep up an open warren, where the tenants are not so numerous as to need feeding. If only the keeper is able to protect them against vermin and poachers, they will multiply fast enough to provide constant shooting and some profitable trapping. Some, indeed, who have tried

the experiment believe (as a friend of mine puts it) that 'for profit and pleasure and plenty of rabbits the best way is for a man to farm his own property, and keep up what stock he likes.' This gentleman has an estate of over 2,000 acres on which he kills some 2,000 rabbits a year, and his tenants—it is a case of pull devil pull baker—about as many more. It is obvious that when rental, wages, and other expenses have to be raised from the little beasts, the numbers reared must be vastly greater than that. And yet, on hilly land which commands no high rental, and is only good enough to grow mountain grass, furze, bracken, and some gorse for cover, the experiment seems worth trying. Even here, however, the disappointments may be many and grave. 'I enclosed,' writes one of my correspondents, 'about a hundred acres of the most rabbitry part of the property—plantations, furze, grass and so forth. There was a good stock when I enclosed, but I found after a time that there were actually fewer rabbits inside the wire than outside, where they were exposed to the tenants. I think,' he concludes, 'rabbits must like roaming as hares do.'

It might be thought from the beast's excessive and almost dangerous fecundity, that if a few pairs were carefully surrounded the population would soon swarm to the extreme limits of subsistence. Yet it does not come out that way in practice. In the first place, the fence must be cunningly constructed to keep him within, for he will speedily burrow under sunken wire

or any wall whose foundations are not on the solid rock. And yet his engineering is not difficult to foil. When he wants to get out of an enclosure he marches close up to the fence and begins mining ; and if ten inches or so of wire are laid flat on the ground or buried a couple of inches below the surface his game is up. Rats, which are much more clever and inventive, will begin their operations several feet from the obstacle they want to pass. On a hundred-acre warren, I have found many rat-holes, but not one through which a rabbit could escape. Where there is egress, however, he is quick to take advantage of it. As soon as the grass becomes fouled nature seems to prompt him to go afield for food. Even sheep refuse to crop along the borders of a plantation stocked with rabbits : and in successful warrening to keep the grass wholesome is more than half the battle. There are various devices. One—an extremely good one—is once or twice a year to sow the land with salt in the proportion of about five hundred pounds to the acre. The mineral not only purifies the ground, but has a medicinal effect upon the tenants, as anyone may find out for himself who will compare the results of a *post-mortem* of specimens killed inland and on the sea links. The livers of the former are far more frequently diseased than are those of the latter. Another useful artifice is to leave as many as possible of those bare sandy spots which the creatures delight to visit in the moonlight. Everything that induces them to scratch and

play at a distance from the grass is an advantage. It is doubtless their instinct of what is necessary for health which drives them to make such desperate efforts at escape. Where there is no restraint at night, they roam frantic and far, for it is common to find traces of them miles from any burrow.

The wire fence must be planned as well to bar the way in as the way out. Young rabbits do especially rejoice in enemies. There is hardly a bird of carnivorous habit but esteems them (as Mr. Swinburne says of other game) most 'delicate and desirable.' The owl, skimming heath and bracken at dusk, makes off with one whenever he has the chance ; the carrion crow and the rook pounce on the little creatures in the act of taking their morning bath of sunlight on the green grass outside the parent burrow ; there is not a hawk but delights in them ; and even the sombre and lonely heron, that long-legged, patient eremite, will gobble them up if they venture near the bush where he stands sentinel. No fence is a protection against these ; but with trap and gun the keeper may easily keep them from doing serious damage. No fence will keep out the poachers on four legs. The rat, as we have seen, will burrow his way in ; when he is there he plays havoc with his finds ; and, as with the birds, there is nothing for it but to shoot, ferret, and trap. That net would be fine of mesh indeed through which the weasel could not squeeze his obscene slenderness ; but he has a queer fancy for 'trusting to

one poor hole,' and so he helps the keeper to an opportunity of knocking him on the head. Other creatures climb over, and amongst the worst of these are the common cat (when it has forsaken civilisation and the tiles for savagery and the woods), and the stoat, which seems able to climb anything, and whose custom is to leap on the rabbit's back, fasten his teeth in his neck, and ride him till he drops dead. One night I saw a fox clamber up the bole of a tree and leap into the warren. But it is easy to make the fence a snare to all these ruffians. If a breadth of wire is run along the top of it drooping inwards at an angle of something over forty-five degrees (like the eaves of a house) it foils the most agile. Even the squirrel breaks his heart in a vain endeavour to get away ; he climbs up the fence, but is beaten when he finds himself cornered at the top. In the end, however, everything depends on the warrener. Unless he is quick to detect their presence and vigilant to slay, the carnivora, winged and footed, will make the warren their home. For the benefit of human poachers it is well to have the fence well roughened with spikes. That will not prevent them from getting in ; but if (it is pleasant to know) they are startled at their work and make a hurried attempt to get out, they can only succeed at the cost of lacerated hands and ruined clothes. Where the proprietor is not constantly resident, however, it occasionally happens that systematic robbery is carried on by the warrener.

In the larger warrens to have plump rabbits and saleable, feeding in the autumn and winter is absolutely necessary ; and there seems little doubt that the best thing is the carrot. Not only is it eaten with relish, but also it is fattening and nourishing. Moreover, it does not tend to pot-belly—that ruin of rabbits—which is the effect of cabbage, turnips, and other more flatulent vegetables. In a large warren with which I am familiar, there has not been a single case of disease, except among hares, which every now and then are picked up dead ; and the owner attributes this to a plentiful use of wheat straw. Little bunches thereof are left dangling in the wind under a thatch covering, where they keep quite dry. Rabbits come out o' nights and nibble the ends, and lick the rock-salt set near. But (it should be added) the warren is not overcrowded, and annually almost a clean sweep is made of it, and new blood is imported from the neighbouring plantations to prevent in-breeding. The warren, too, has the inestimable advantage of being within easy distance of a town ; so that if the poulterer telegraphs his order (say) at nine in the morning, he may at twelve have on his counter a plentiful supply of rabbits. Three hours before they were nibbling carrots in the field ; and where this is possible the rabbit-farmer competes on favourable terms with the importer.

DRIVING WHALES

FOR the late summer tourist there is no more invigorating place than the Orkney Islands. The bloom on the heather comes late and lingers long. When the pedestrian has climbed Wideford Hill, and has at his feet Kirkwall, with its quaint stone-roofed houses resting under the shadow of St. Magnus, he is intoxicated by the salt wind blowing from the craggy coast of Caithness across the Pentland Firth, over the low heathery hills of Orcadia, and ruffling the ocean streams that wash the shores of a hundred islands, churning the blue water till it makes a white fringe for low Shapinsay, and rocky Ronaldshay, and Westray, and Egilshay, and sweeping round the Thieves' Holm and the Horse of Copinshay. He feels that here is indeed the home of the mariner and the sea-gull. And when he is satisfied with archæological study and observation, when he has looked into the grey churches on the sea-coast, and wandered among the Standing Stones of Stennis, and tried to decipher the runes in Maeshowe, he finds that in the present, too, there is much that is fruitful of interest and amusement.

For instance, on that very Wideford Hill which we suppose him to have climbed, there stands a cairn of white skulls, and by the Peerie Sea there is a set of furnaces. They are connected with what is, now

that the wrecking trade has been ruined by civilisation, the most exciting event in island life—the slaughter of a shoal of whales. It is a form of sport which, unfortunately, can only be enjoyed by accident. Were it otherwise, the whale would be driven as systematically as the deer is driven, and we should soon have the great mammal on the game list. But local superstition ascribes his coming to a special intervention of Providence. ‘When the whales come, O Lord, dinna forget Eday!’ used to be one of the weekly petitions of an old-world minister. And it may as well be stated, for the benefit of those who do not know, that the event referred to must not be confounded with the stranding of a huge Greenlander—a type which, unfortunately for the Dundee whaler, does not roam about in large herds, though a single estray may occasionally be seen from the boat between Aberdeen and Kirkwall. It is the smaller variety, known as the bottle-nosed whale, or *Delphinus deductor*—so called because the herd follows the lead of a king bull as wild cattle do. The Orcadians name it the ‘ca’ing’ whale because of the shrill bleat of the calves. It travels in immense shoals, and strays into straits and channels from which it does not seem to know the means of egress. Thus, except for the fact that the straits, channels, bays and voes of Orkney teem with snares in their indentations and sinuosities, it has no special connection with the islands. Shoals have frequently been killed in the Hebrides; they have

been seen far southward off the east coast; and the largest slaughter of which any record is extant took place near the Faroe Islands in 1644, when over a thousand were killed in two expeditions. In the last year of last century, over two hundred were slain near Fetlar.

In a general way the temperament of the islesman is slow and torpid, but at the cry of 'Whales in the bay!' he wakens up to an extraordinary extent; for there never was a sea-loving people which was not fond of sport, and besides, the sport is lucrative. So whether from church or market, from meat or labour, there is an instantaneous rush to the sea-side. Boats appear as if by magic from you cannot tell where, but every islander seems to have one of some sort. Young and old, the strong and the weak, are equally excited, and arm themselves with the first weapons that come handy: rusty harpoons and ancient flint-guns, scythes, sickles, and pike-staffs. Sometimes, indeed, the whole sport will be spoiled in the flurry, as happened a few seasons back. A cetacean had stranded himself on the sandy shore of Scapa Flow, when a too ardent farmer rushed forward and stabbed him with a dung-fork. Frantic with pain, the creature made a desperate effort, edged off into deep water, and very soon the occasional glitter of a fin or an uncouth gambol told the disappointed onlookers that all the shoal was off to the Pentland Firth. But should no such accident betide, the fleet

of boats, crazy-looking cobs and skiffs—most of them under oars, but if there is a breeze many with sails—move out to form a semicircle round the shoal. There is a din as if Bedlam had broken loose, for the object is to frighten the whales till in terror and confusion they rush on the shallows and ground. So the water is splashed with the oars, improvised and most unmelodious drums are beaten, and there is a yelling loud enough to wake the dead. From this unearthly turmoil the shy and timid quarry gradually retreats. Yet the battle is not over. If the king bull begins to grow suspicious of the shore, he will turn and charge through the boats. Then there is confusion, indeed, for his lieges follow, and vain are all efforts to arrest their flight. Guns are fired and harpoons cast ; boats are upset, and the cries of half-drowned men and boys mingle with the uproar. If the whales take a direction likely to lead them into further difficulties, chase is given, and the whole business begins again.

Should there be no stampede, the din and excitement increase, till at last the bewildered creatures rush on their doom in the shallows. The boats close upon them, and then begins a murder grim and great. As the islanders hack, and stab, and hew, the scene changes altogether. Soon the surf is incarnadined with blood, and the shrill dying cries of the whales are distinctly heard in the uproar. They show no fight, for they are the least combative and the gentlest of creatures ; but some die harder than

others, and a few of the tough bulls still ply their tails and beat the surf into a semi-crimson foam after they have lost much blood and received many wounds. Extremely few escape—a fact which is due to their affectionate nature. They will not leave a wounded comrade behind, and whole shoals are said to have been ruined by this characteristic ; for they will swim round a floating carcase and cry on it to follow, while the harpooner takes them one by one. So, too, the mother which has lost her calf will hover round till she too meets her fate. Were it not that every whale killed means money, the Orcadians might be touched to mercy ; but though far from cruel in their dispositions, such thoughts are remote from their minds during a whale-hunt. To lay on right and left, and multiply the number of carcasses which will be ultimately dragged ashore from these sea shambles, is all their desire. Nor is it possible to blame them, for a shoal of whales is a splendid windfall to people of whom it has been truthfully said that few are wretchedly poor, and fewer still inconveniently rich. Long ago, when their condition was worse than it is now, and a homelier idea of eating was prevalent in both the North and Western Islands, it was customary to pickle the whale-beef for food ; and those who have tasted it assert that it is by no means bad. Even now, when the Faroe Islanders hear of a great catch, they come in those curious boats of theirs and bargain for it. But the whale's chief value lies in his blubber ; and

the flensers, or flenchers, as they are locally called, are soon at work stripping this off, while rough furnaces are erected, and the disagreeable odour which mingles with the fresh breeze from the sea tells what is going on long after the pure waves have washed every trace of struggle from the shore. When all is done, however, there may be a sum varying from 150*l.* to 400*l.* to divide among those who took part in the hunt; and when the terrible Orcadian storms are driving the foam from one island shore to another, and the inmates are seated round the peat fire of the cottage, not the least effective of the many plans for whiling away the winter hours will be to recount the prowess and skill shown in the great whale hunt.

WILD CATTLE

SINCE the new line of railway has been opened between Cornhill and Alnwick, the easiest way to reach Chillingham from Edinburgh is to get to Cornhill *viâ* either Berwick or Waverley route, and thence to Wooler, where there is now a station. No one, however, who visits this part of the country for the first time can do better than forego the luxury of steam for the last stage; the wide Roman road is excellent for driving, and leads through a land charming in itself, and full of historical and romantic associa-

tions. On the left hand is 'the deep and sullen Till,' flowing under historic bridges like Twizel, and past such well-known Border fortresses as Etal and Ford ; on the right are the broad blue Cheviots, with dark Flodden close at hand, and as worthy of its epithet to-day as in the time of Scott, and Yeavinger Bell towering in the distance. There is hardly a castle which has not been the scene of a foray, hardly a field whose name does not testify to the baptism of battle. From Wooler, where the prudent traveller will bait his steed and order dinner, the distance is about seven miles, whence the way leads across the Till by a rickety bridge and Wooler Water by a ford. If the visitor is so unfortunate as to arrive at Chillingham in the midst of the pic-nic season, he will probably have time enough to admire the old church and Lord Tankerville's castle before the keeper is at liberty to show him over the park.

But the last time I was there it was towards evening, and the castle shadows had lengthened, and a gloom was gathering among the trees in the park. It is then or at early dawn you most vividly realise that the cattle are wild in the fullest sense of the term. During the day they lie about in secluded corners of the park, or they rest in the woods ; but, like the hare and the rabbit, they begin to move about when dusk comes. And the most interesting thing about them now is their habits. With their appearance Sir Edwin Landseer and other artists in ink as well as paint

have made us familiar, and there is no need to describe again the pure white coats and those heads which with their bold upward-curving horns, alert glowing eyes, and black muzzles, seem the very incarnation of wild, shy energy and beauty. Nor is it necessary to rediscuss their origin, as it is still a moot question whether they are descended from a native breed of white cattle—a view taken by Mr. Darwin—or sprang from progenitors imported at some almost prehistoric period. Local tradition settles the question very summarily, for it says they appeared on the scene miraculously. When the sun went down there was not such a thing in the park ; when it rose they were roaming among the trees and over the rough hills. An aged keeper who was here over thirty years, and who, coming originally from the neighbourhood of Kingussie, places small faith in Northumbrian folklore, has by his scepticism done much to dissipate this superstition.

It is the extreme wildness of the creatures, however, which is their most interesting characteristic. Theirs is an entirely undomesticated nature. For instance, if a calf which has been concealed by its mother in a thicket is surprised by a visitor, it does not, as a farm one inevitably would, make a vain attempt to fly, but drops like a stone and crouches among the fern as a hare does in its form, as a rabbit will do if you are between him and his burrow, as a young pewit will do among the grey stones of the

cornfield. Approach it, and its head is at once set for butting, even though the attempt should cause the feeble little creature to stumble and fall on the fern. In their own struggles—and they are the most quarrelsome of beasts—they display the cunning of our cleverest wild things. A young bull which is getting the worst of an encounter with the tough old king of the herd will fall and sham death exactly as a weasel does when it wants to beguile you into freeing it from a trap; but as soon as the conqueror marches off, the other, which very likely has not been hurt at all, will get up and begin grazing. The heifers hide their young in a quiet place, to which at intervals they return for nursing purposes as warily as a bird to its nest. And the method employed for their capture is precisely analogous to that used for snaring some other wild beasts. It is in winter alone that they show any signs of tameness, but when the frost is hard and the snow lies, and there is no food on the heights, then they become dependent for support on the long cart sent with hay or turnips. This they have learned to follow fearlessly, and it has consequently become the favourite place of ambush when it is desirable to shoot them. For it is hardly necessary to say that their numbers are kept under control. Lord Tankerville does not care to see the herd dwindle below sixty or multiply much above seventy; it numbers seventy-three at present. If some limit were not placed to the numbers of bulls, they might re-enact the tragedy of

the Kilkenny cats, for they fight all the year round, kneeling on their fore-legs and throwing the turf over their heads when they challenge. To say that they deliberately kill off the wounded, weak, or ailing is as untrue of them as it is of other wild beasts. But a bull must always be able to keep his head with his horns. When they are roaming or feeding, apparently out of mere devilment one gives another a prod or a push whenever he has the opportunity. Thus a weak bull or heifer, being unable to offer a strong defence, is not by any constructive design, but by a series of accidents, gored and butted to death. In captivity they are as difficult to tame as house mice, even the half and the quarter breeds retaining much of the ancient combativeness. It is very seldom that either on account of sickness or for breeding and crossing purposes there are not one or two in the paddock ; and these the visitor may examine.

To get close to the herd is impossible. Their scent is so good that a cow has been known to follow a man's track like a bloodhound, and their ears are correspondingly acute. You can only get near enough to bring them in range of a good glass, and even then every head will be turned towards you, and the flapping ears will show how little is needed to give the alarm. But it is not necessary for them either to see or hear. If the deer, of which there is a herd of about seven hundred in the park, are alarmed, and fly in the direction of the cattle, the latter also are almost certain

to take to their heels. It is the constant aim of the proprietor to have as few of these stampedes as possible ; for, as the cattle breed all the year round, such alarms and excursions prove fatal to more calves than it is easy to estimate ; and the breeding of so large an animal in wildness is at the best attended with much danger and difficulty. To see them to advantage therefore it is advisable to go alone or with a single companion. And no time can be better than when the clouds above Trickle Wood are reddening with the sunset. Then, as one white form after another is seen emerging from the wood, trampling the fern, cropping the herbage, and biting at the low branches, it is possible to realise what this part of the country must have been like when the deer and cattle had the great forest of Cheviot to roam in, and when all the land between Wooler and Millfield was one sea of yellow broom.

A SUMMER IDYL

AMONG the inhabitants of our lakes and rivers, I do not believe there is a greater fraud and disappointment than the pike. Other fish have a character and ideal, and live up to them ; he is only trustworthy in so far as that he is certain to disappoint expectation, to be shy when he should be ravenous and ravenous when he should be shy. That is not the opinion of expert anglers, or of those who write books on fishing ;

I only give it as the result of my own experience, the experience of an ignorant Cockney.

I was introduced to the pike under peculiar circumstances. It used to be my invariable custom to spend about a month in summer in a quiet Northumbrian inn on the banks of the Till. My reasons for doing so I am not obliged to state. Perhaps it was because my friend Tom Burton's father lived in the neighbourhood, perhaps because I have a poet's love of the low blue Cheviot Hills and the silent prosperous district over which they cast their shadow, and as a third perhaps I will say that it possibly may have been because Mary Burton, Tom's sister, was the sweetest and loveliest maid on the Borders. Indeed it was through thinking so much of her that ever I came to see the pike at all—I say the pike because it is to one particular jack I refer.

I will explain how it came about. As I am of a reserved disposition and dislike being teased about my affairs, I found it necessary to blind my associates in London as to my real purposes in the North of England, so before I took my second journey, I bought a beautiful trouting-rod and spent a fabulous sum on tackle of various descriptions, and gave out that I had become an enthusiastic angler. Such nonsense as that was to be sure! But by reading old Walton, I gained enough of knowledge to serve conversational purposes, and when I came home I made no scruple to tell a number of extraordinary stories regarding

the havoc I had made among the trout, and even (Heaven forgive me!) the salmon. I do not claim to possess any extraordinary inventive powers on account of such tales; on the contrary, observation has taught me that among anglers the gift is quite common.

With me, fishing was a very simple process. But before I describe it let me enter a much-needed protest against Sir Walter Scott's reference to my favourite river as 'the deep and sullen Till.' In the neighbourhood of Flodden Hill it does happen to flow in the midst of green haughs—and how beautiful they are in June when the silvery hue of the daisies is broken only by the gold of buttercups in the centre and the blue of speedwells lining the river-brink!—and its slow pace is still further retarded by several mill-dams; but travel either up or down you will find it streaming gaily past rock and boulder, or clasping in its great arms a buxom island clothed with long grass and fern out of which trees of various kinds are projected. If I do not inform my readers which part I admire most, it is for good and sufficient reasons. It is enough to say that it is one of the most romantic portions of the river. On the one bank a great wood stretches away for miles overshadowing a cool and shaded walk, and the outermost trees wave their branches over the river; on the other is a steep and broken incline, with gorse and bracken enough on it to form a tolerably good fox-cover. Past the wood

and the whin the river dances in broken streams that are a joy to the heart of a trout-fisher.

I am not a real but only a make-believe angler, and therefore when I sallied forth with rod and line I carefully avoided the streams. On the few occasions on which I had been tempted to take any other course one of two things had invariably happened. Either my flies had caught the treetops and been lost there, or if I did manage to get them on to the water they speedily got hanked on the weeds and suffered the same fate. As a lover of the picturesque I adored the streams, and especially at even when the rising moon happened to shine straight down the river and the water like Time moved ever on with its sob or smile, over and past the shadows that waved or were motionless, past them as it had rolled past their ancestors ere the trees that cast them were born, past them as it will roll past their innumerable successors. But as an angler I hated the streams. My favourite place for fishing was in the pool above them; close beside it was an old willow-tree, the roots of which had been laid bare by the floods. The tree itself, though green and healthy, had fallen almost prostrate in a downward direction. About twenty yards further up was one of those great beds of weed that are so numerous in a hot summer.

My method of fishing, as I have hinted, was simplicity itself. It was merely to cast a line with a worm into this hole, sit down, light a pipe or cigar, and watch

the float. In the course of half-an-hour or so a bobbing up and down of the cork would give warning that something was at the bait. My plan was to give the creature plenty of time. If it continued to tug for five minutes or so I would pull it out, generally to find that it was an abominable eel. Sometimes, however, the appearance of a perch would diversify the proceedings and afford me immense gratification. I was rendered exceedingly proud once by getting no fewer than four of these—to my mind—beautiful fish in little more than as many minutes.

I was no angler, and I took no delight in angling, but as I sat in the shade of the willow-tree it was amusing to watch the water-rats playing among the branches, or the little rabbits popping in and out of their holes on the banks, or a water-hen feeding, its brood of young swimming after it like so many tiny balls of black wool. One day, while thus watching and musing my eye fell upon the water, and what was my delight and surprise to notice a great fine-looking fish floating close to the weeds. He might be perhaps four feet below the surface of the clear water, and never moved, except almost automatically to wave his fin or slightly bend his tail. It has always been a great pleasure to me to see closely for the first time any free healthy wild creature, and I might have watched there long enough but that I was desirous of knowing its name. I therefore signalled to the game-

keeper, who was coming along with his gun, and asked him what it was.

‘Bless you, sir,’ he answered, ‘it’s but an ugly pike. That is his hole ; you may see him any day, and if it warn’t for the tree roots and the weeds and the bad landing-place, I would quick shift him with a net. I killed over a hundred in the early part of the summer. They had fairly destroyed the trout-fishing.’

The keeper, whose acquaintance with me was of long standing, sat down and told me a number of extraordinary stories about pike. I was interested, but not moved. To hear about the pike was pleasant enough, but to fish for him would have demanded too much exertion in hot weather. So I smoked and listened in a very calm and dispassionate state of mind.

The evening after, as I was walking on the river-side with Mary Burton, I happened in an evil hour to relate to her this incident of the pike—enlarging for dramatic effect on his ferocity and appetite.

My relations with Mary need explanation. I had been her lover for several years, but it was one of her peculiarities to believe that this was a secret. As well as being the prettiest, she was the shyest girl in the district. Although there was no barrier to our union, she always put me off when I asked her to allow me to ask her father’s consent to its taking place. That night, under the orchard trees, before parting with her I was urging my suit with more than

usual impetuosity, when all at once a bright look flashed upon the drooping face.

‘Well, dear,’ she said, ‘I will when’—and at this word the soft eyes began to twinkle with mischief and the sweet lips to assume their sauciest curl—‘when. . . . when. . . . you catch that pike! Good-night’—and before I had quite recovered from the shock, her light dress had disappeared into the house, whence a moment after issued a single peal of soft low mocking laughter.

For a while I felt as a man feels who has been ‘chaffed’ and made ridiculous when he was rather inclined to show off. In the darkness my face flushed to think what a useless ‘tailor’—their strongest term of contempt—I must appear to these country-people. But the joke had been made in a style too pleasant for it to wound deeply, and with a little effort I soon rallied, but it was with a curious sense of pique. ‘I shall take you at your word, Lady-bird,’ I said to myself on my way back to the inn; ‘they laugh best who laugh last, and it will be your turn to blush when I throw down that pike at your feet.’ How thankful I felt at that moment for having brought with me some books on angling! Before going to bed I had learned what each of them had to say about the pike, and nothing could by any possibility have been more encouraging; ‘a fresh-water shark,’ said one; ‘the most ravenous of river fishes,’ said another; ‘will swallow anything,’ averred a third; ‘might be killed with a

rusty hook and a clothes-line,' contemptuously said a fourth great authority. 'Ho; Ho: Lady-bird,' I thought to myself. 'Little did you know how easy was the task you set me. Evidently you knew no more about the pike than I did.' Had there been proper tackle at hand I should have gone to the river-side before going to bed, so sure did I feel that master jack could be had for the asking. While I slept that night he was slain a hundred time and more—and each time I awoke and discovered the mistake I vowed afresh that he should not see to-morrow's sun go down.

To make assurance doubly sure, I stepped over next morning to the gamekeeper's cottage to get his advice on some minor points, and also to borrow a stout rod and line—my own accoutrement being meant for small trout fishing. Before starting I jotted down what the books seemed to think the favourite baits. These were a lump of fat bacon, an eel's head, a frog, a small trout and a minnow; others were given, but these seemed the most popular, and I made up my mind to try them in the order in which they are set down. I resolved to say nothing to the keeper about my book-knowledge, but to test the one by the other. When I entered the paddock in front of the dog-kennels he was stripped to the shirt beside a tub of water apparently washing a liver and white setter.

'Good morning, James,' I said affably, 'you seem busy.'

'Verra, sir. Gettin' the dogs right for next mouth;

they were dressed yesterday, and they're gettin' a wesh this morning. Come up in a week and see the difference of them.'

'I am rather sorry you are so much engaged as I had a slight favour to ask, but take a taste of this to kill the odour of these animals,' and I handed him a flask with which I had specially armed myself—for I have not spent so much time in the country without learning the surest way to 'fetch' a gamekeeper. 'The truth is,' I continued, 'I've taken a strong notion to fish for pike, but I have no suitable rod, and besides I don't know anything about it, and would like a hint from you.'

This was enough. A strong rod and line could easily be procured, and for the rest I learned that my baits were as likely as not to meet with success, 'only,' said my mentor honestly, 'I never try pike myself except with the net;' his information was all second-hand. As I went away—to meet him in a couple of hours, when, as he thought, the dogs would be washed, the ferrets fed, and other pressing duties done—I carelessly remarked, 'I would stand you a bottle of the best whisky, Robson, if you could put me up to getting that pike at the willow-tree some time this week.'

'If you mean it I'll try,' answered the gamekeeper.

That afternoon at four o'clock I might have been seen with a gigantic rod twenty feet long, and of tremendous weight, labouring at my accustomed place,

heaving a huge lump of bacon over the weeds, and letting it float down past the pool into the stream. It was very exciting at first, for every few minutes the pike seemed to be there, until I discovered that it was the bait caught on weeds or stones. After two hours of such exercise my arms ached fearfully, so throwing my bait into the pool with a float, I sat down and smoked in the semi-despair of smothered expectation. Fruitlessly however ; darkness came and I was forced to go home with an empty basket. That night I scored fat bacon out of all my books, and in the morning continued the campaign with an eel's head ; with a bait like that, I felt myself insulting the enemy, and was hardly disappointed when once more the sun went down without jack as much as venturing out. Next day, however, I thought myself bound to succeed. The keeper had procured a beautiful yellow frog, and all the ancient and modern writers seemed to agree that this was the lure most tempting to a hungry jack. My piscatorial tutor put it nicely on the hooks, so nicely that it swam about with evident enjoyment and agility. He had a big float to keep it from sinking too far down, and sinkers to hinder it from rising too far up ; it was gently and firmly coerced into pursuing a strict *via media*. Still jack was not tempted. He made no effort to contest the ownership of the frog, and that unhappy animal after struggling until I was sorry for it, finally managed to escape by swimming into the weeds. When I drew out the

line he was off and away. I felt too dispirited to try another, and my belief in the voracity of the pike was greatly shaken. I grew desperate, and seriously meditated asking the keeper to kill a pike for me with the net, which I was prepared to affirm was my friend at the willow-tree. I reserved that, however, as the last resource of a baffled and beaten lover.

My next effort was with a minnow. At first I tried to follow the keeper's directions and work it about in the neighbourhood of the weeds, but as the only result of this was that my line caught on the bottom, I flung it in with a cork float. This time I imagined that I was really to be successful, for as I lay and watched, down with a strong long pull went the cork. My hands shook with excitement as I seized the rod and felt a weight at it such as I had never felt before. With a strong effort, I struggled to remember all I had read and heard about running a great fish, and most warily and cautiously set about landing the monster. But he wouldn't run. When I pulled he put a great stress on the line, when I gave him his way he did not move more than a few yards. This did not last long, for if he would not 'play' I thought the sooner I got him out the better, so man against fish we both pulled, with the consequence that I proved the stronger and to my infinite disgust succeeded in placing upon the greensward a monstrous eel! I felt hurt. The denizens of the deep seemed to be having a small joke at me. Nevertheless, I tried

again with minnow and got another great eel, but no pike.

Next day, when trying with trout, I nerved myself with the thought that this was my last but best chance. The day was approaching on which it would be necessary for me to return to London, and even had that not been the case, I wanted the courage requisite to try any more devices. I prayed the Gods to be propitious to one struggling so hard to achieve a great object by honourable means, and in my inmost heart I threatened them that I would say farewell to honesty if they failed me. All was of no use. As I was exerting all my muscle to make a big cast with my gigantic rod, the hook caught in a whin-bush behind me and crack! the top was broken. Sorrowfully and despairingly, I took up the fragments, and with a long and dismal face, carried them back to the keeper. I had reached the end of my patience. My gloom was momentarily dispersed when I entered the paddock. The man of traps and guns, crimson with rage and with a great board in his hand, was careering in full chase after a fine game bantam I had often admired on previous occasions. 'It has nearly killed his best carrier pigeon,' said his comely wife, in explanation of an outburst which was not nearly so surprising to her as to me. In a few minutes her husband came up carrying the dead bird by the heels. As soon as he saw me, his countenance cleared, and his first question was, had I killed the pike? At my

mishap he only laughed. Give it up? Oh no, he would not let me give it up, he was not in the habit of slipping his chances of a bottle of whisky so easily as that.

‘Look here, sir,’ he said, producing a great bottle in which three nice trout were swimming. ‘I kept these as a last chance. We’ll try a line,’ and he looked quite happy and certain. ‘You be fishing at about eight to-night as usual with your little rod, and I’ll step round that way. I want a rabbit at any rate.’

As I had been previously struck with the great determination and resourcefulness of this man I implicitly obeyed his directions. Before the appointed time I was at my station. Putting a nice red worm on my hook, I flung it in and sat down on a stump to have a smoke until my friend appeared. While in this posture I was so completely shrouded from view by the willows that a great heron, without seeing me, came up from the stream flapping his heavy wings, and alit to fish in one of the shallow streams. I was watching it so intently that I never saw the keeper until his hand was on my shoulder, and he said, ‘There’s something at your line, sir.’

‘Oh, never mind the line, it’s only an eel, but look at that bird! Can’t you shoot him?’ The gun was cocked in a moment, but the heron was out of gunshot, and, as if it had heard what we were saying, rose up and departed across the wood to another bend in the river

Then I turned to my line little dreaming what a curious lesson in angling I was about to receive. Dip, dip, dip went the cork below the water, but never stopped long. The jerks were just like those of a small eel. Very carelessly did I commence to draw it in. As I was doing so, however, the fish suddenly seemed to become endowed with the strength of a demon. The reel creaked as the line flew out like lightning. 'Let him go,' yelled the keeper. 'By the Lord Harry, if it's not the pike.' I did let him go. And now the fish getting into mid-stream and not being hooked went slowly, yet as if he knew there was something wrong he rose to the surface. I noticed my line getting higher and higher until at last it seemed to lie on the top of the water. Then there was a swish and plunge, the report of a gun, a cloud of smoke, and my line dangled loose.

'Pull him out,' said the keeper.

'He's off,' said I.

'He's not, for I shot him,' said the keeper.

Thereupon I drew the line in, and joy! I felt after all something at the end of it.

'It's the dead pike,' said the keeper.

'We'll soon see,' I answered, and pulled it ashore. I lifted it easily enough, for to my chagrin what I had hooked was the smallest, most insignificant-looking mite of a red-finned perch it has ever been my lot to see. I stared at it in blank amazement. Imagination failed to conceive how that trembling creature

could have put such stress on my line. I was roused from my unpleasant reverie by the voice of the keeper, who was saying as much to himself as to me :

‘I saw the shot strike him. If that fish isn’t killed I’ve made him no weel’—a favourite saying of his when he had wounded anything badly without bringing it immediately down.

‘What fish?’ I asked bitterly. ‘Do you call that thing a fish?’ touching the poor perch with my toe.

‘That! no, I mean the pike. Didn’t you see him take your perch as you were drawing it in? I shot him when he came to the top, and I’ll bet my boots he drifts into the stream.’

We both strained our eyes to look for him in the clear shallow water where the pool merges in the stream. ‘Look yonder!’ cried the keeper; and sure enough there was the white belly of a dying fish struggling to keep itself from being floated into the head of the stream. Not one word did I say, but springing up to the waist in water, I darted into the river, and too eager to wait quietly while the pike drifted to a shallow where I could pick him up, down I dived for him at once, and emerged dripping and triumphant with him in my arms.

‘Hoorah!’ shouted the keeper. ‘Dod, but he is a slapper!’ and when weighed it turned the scale at

seven and twenty pounds. After getting out I was a new man.

‘You take that fish up to Miss Burton,’ I said to the keeper, ‘and when you return to the house you’ll find your bottle all right. In the meantime I will change my dress.’

Shortly after, feeling quite fresh and invigorated after the bath, dressed according to my best taste, and with a choice flower in my button-hole, I stepped up to see Mr. Burton, greatly to the confusion and dismay of his daughter, who tried hard to make us believe that she had never meant what she had said. Before leaving the farmhouse that night we had a consultation over the fate of the pike. Mary timidly proposed to stuff him.

‘Stoof him ! Thou’lt stoof none of him,’ said her Yorkshire parent. ‘Woife, thou’lt have him done for breakfast to-morrow morning, an’ a bit o’ fat bacon ; and thou’lt come, lad, and help us eat un.’

Need I say how gladly I promised ?

I looked in at the keeper’s as I was going home that night, and I am sorry to confess that I found him and a crony just finishing the whisky, while he tried incoherently to relate the adventure for the hundredth time.

The rough winds of autumn had stripped the trees of their tender foliage, and the frosts and floods had swept the weed-beds from the river when I returned to Tillside, to carry thence a bride pure as the snow

that now mantled the Cheviots, as shy as the wild things that lived there. We kept no memorial of the pike, but we called our first-born Jack, and there he lies in the cradle at this instant a sleeping monument to my victory over his namesake.

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AUTUMN



AN AUTUMN REVERIE

IF there is any type of man I fear, it is Carlyle's favourite Ram Dass 'with fire in his belly.' Unmetaphored I grant him to be a fit object for philosophic admiration, a person of vigour, bustle, energy, and other virile qualities to which the professed idler lays no claim ; but am I wrong in relating Ram Dass to certain men of whom biographies are written, and who are linked together by their fiery attribute ? Ah ! you need not smile and grunt ready acquiescence, as if you expected a welcome though well-worn gibe. If I do not love the self-made millionaire, whose fortune is founded on the solitary half-crown with which he fared to town in his boyhood ; it is neither because of his ignorance—which I respect—nor his snobbery, that is amusing, nor any of the other characteristics that make him the aversion of cultivated people. It is exclusively on account of that same ' fire in his belly,' the purpose and energy distinguish-

ing and differentiating him from the rest. Essentially and with but slight variation of gift he is one with others who make a hubbub on the otherwise quiet earth, with the heaven-born artist who on his first slate drew a caricature of his nurse, the poet who rhymed 'jam' and 'ham' before he quite knew the use of either, the urchin novelist who romanced to his uncle while still in short clothes—all those, in a word, whose missions date from the cradle, and who thus are looped together by this fiery kindredship. Whether he works with paint or plot, rhyme or soap, words or votes, the man of mark, the celebrity of the day, will be shunned and feared by him who loves to lie i' the sun beyond hearing of the troubled noise.

The matchless charm of the might-have-been is dearer to me than any joy in mere accomplishment. Of the fortune which is made, the book which is written, there is an end as far as personal interest goes. In hard and definite outline, finite and therefore disappointing, its exact contours have emerged from the hazy fairy land of futurity shorn of all romantic hopes and boundless possibilities. But what is still undone supplies inexhaustible food to the imagination. Therefore do I love the unpractical theorist who is ever conjuring up visions that shine and are beautiful as long as they are untested and unapproached, but fade and die if you attempt to reduce them to practice, and dislike the narrow practical man whose horizon is confined to the practical and possible

and who blushes to be suspected of beating the air. It is pleasanter to sit by one's own library fire of a winter night, and dissect the latest financial project by which an always unfortunate, always hopeful neighbour is prepared to lose another slice of his patrimony, than to follow a bragging, smug-faced, successful man about, as with an insinuated boast he shows in turn his furniture, his pictures, his horses, and other damning proofs of his having lived in direct opposition to the ideal life. And surely, to loiter in a woody lane on a summer afternoon and listen as a young poet describes the never-to-be-printed tragedy by which he hopes to electrify London until you are almost infected with his enthusiasm, is more like real poetry than to stand before an author's bookcase and number row upon row of the works by which his fame has been achieved. Until disillusion has actually come to your speculative friend, you have the pleasure of hoping that at last his ill-luck is to be retrieved, and until the poet becomes disgusted with the return of his manuscripts and goes into a place in the City, it is a delight to sit on the willow-stump by the river and share his dreams. There is no need to mourn over their disappointments, for ere the climax comes other aspirants will have come to inspire you with new hopes.

Nothing leads more inevitably to a doleful conversation than an invitation to discuss some 'actual' or practical idea. It makes one feel as if in a cage.

Imagination may not flutter a wing without dashing it against some iron bar of possibility, and every excursion of whim or fancy is arrested by the author's stolid concentration on the workable. But to enter with zest and seriousness into the consideration of an impossible project is to afford scope for all the light artillery of the mind. Any fanciful suggestion, any wild whim or odd paradox lightly put forward with an 'if,' may provisionally be discussed without the 'if,' till, when drained of entertaining matter, the 'if' is recalled as an executioner. A frolic mood has full swing when there is a luxurious absence of business, and what anyone says is absolutely of no consequence. Of all talkers the most amusing is the hero of the unaccomplished.

What one prizes most in the country, therefore, is the excellent society it affords. I am no poet, and do not refer to nature; neither to the brown hills that the sun kisses at bedtime; nor the winds swishing through the elms and lamenting on the waste; nor the summer swallows that nest in the window nooks; nor the winter robins tapping on the frosty pane; nor to any of the other phenomena whose main use now-a-days appears to be the ornamentation of modern prose, but to the men whose equation is unknown. In town, people are all 'accomplished facts,' and not only does the sight of so much crystallised industry disturb an idler's tranquillity and stimulate him to the exertion he abhors, but when men have adjusted

themselves to their tasks, and given an adequate taste of their quality, the interest for ever has gone from them. It is the untried racer, the youth whose work is not yet begun, and whose power is ungauged, that gives a fillip to surmise and provokes to speculation. To dream the dreams of an ambitious boy, to see in imagination the beardless writer of an epic (in manuscript) laurelled and famous, to single out some village ragamuffin as a Whittington, or in another mood when the mind desires more active employment to prefigure the downfall of their cloud castles, and watch with the mind's eye the bubble reputation glittering far above them, is more delightful than any show of celebrities. When your own time for building visions has passed, and you have learned that to jog inconspicuously through the world is best, there is no pleasanter way of spending a sunny afternoon than to sit on the bole of a fallen tree under a dome of green, and cast golden horoscopes for your friends, weaving romances that will never see Mudie's, and watching a drama played in a theatre of your own building, that like some itinerant plays has an adjustable ending, tragical or comic as your liver may dictate. One generation treads close on the heels of another, and the characters come trooping to you without the trouble of invention, and while the years are checking one set of forecasts you are fashioning others.

If anyone asks what is the ultimate gain, reply that there is no such word as 'gain' in your voca-

bulary, for your fatherhood is of things undone. Unpainted pictures hang in your galleries, the halls of your fancy are peopled with unsculptured statues, in dreamland you have row upon row of unwritten books, to each of which Time the reviewer is appending his unerring verdict.

If one ventures to remark that country life is favourable for study, quotidian persons immediately accept it as a commonplace. That fatuous person, the professional nature lover, breaks out at once with his 'picture,' his epithet and his catalogue: Ah, yes; one has Nature at first hand there. I lay down on a bank of yellow broom. In the valley below, a tattered bare-legged boy is guddling trout in the stony burn. From the gnarled oak beside me, to a green elm on the hill opposite, a cuckoo flew ringing his clear note. A white-throated ousel skims down the stream and lights on a boulder. Near the burn-side a wagtail hops. On the mountain top a fresh breeze is wreathing the mist into waving veils and spirals—and so on *ad infinitum*. It is a wholesome exercise in spring to lie at a sunny dyke back, and hear lambs bleat and birds whistle, while cattle low and the ploughman cheerily speaks to his team as, champing their bits and coming smartly over the headland, they snatch the first tender buds from the hedge at which you are lying; but even a lazy man scruples to call the process studying nature.

There is no more fatal distraction of one's thoughts

in the country than a curiosity about Natural History. To enjoy it thoroughly one must resolutely determine to take no thought of what is passing around. If a man feel under a moral obligation to 'observe' every weasel in chase of a rabbit, if the appearance of a strange bird sends him home to consult a work on ornithology, if a kestrel questing a field mouse excites him, he will be more tranquil in town. The continuity of his ideas is liable to fracture at the most interesting moment. My most delicious reveries come at even-tide, when the river gleams in moonlight, and the slender willow-boughs droop like a dark fountain in play ; but what would become of them if I had a burning anxiety about every warbler that twitters late in the sedges, if the humming of a beetle made me wish to catch it, if I ever asked was that the barn-owl that shrieked ? No, it is a prime essential not only to meditation but enjoyment, that you have only a negative love of wild things—one that consists in an absence of dislike to country sights and sounds.

For example, there is a certain house wherein I love to be alone, but that is unbearable with company. Owing to an easily explained cause, the wind is always singing mournful tunes to its inmates. Look out of the window and you will easily see why ; it stands in a wooded hollow, and the surrounding heights are all fringed with rows of pine-trees. So every visitor is asked to take note of the ceaseless moaning that swells in storm to a raving, and sinks in calm to the

softest and gentlest sigh. Now if others are present, and particularly if my attention is drawn to it, the wind comes laden with dreariness. Waste places over which it has blown spread out before my imagination as I listen; useless force and matter seem piping their lamentation in it. If I hear a so-called lover of Nature posing as a critic of Nature's sorrow, the music chills and haunts me like a despairing wail. But alone and not consciously listening, the accompaniment played on the pine-trees weaves itself into dream and fancy. Pipe after pipe is smoked and relit, while an endless procession of figures in shadow-land pass by—dead and living, real and imaginary—jostling one another in a crowd where all are on an equal footing. Yet if one were to say, 'How sadly the wind moans to-night!' the spell is broken. Presto! Like a troop of ghosts at daybreak, like feeding conies at a gunshot, they have fled. To hear and not to know you are hearing; to see and be unconscious of sight, these are the only means of tasting the delicious influence of Nature.

The companionship of books is not much less of a bore than that of human beings. An intellectual hunger in its mildest form is a distraction, and soon develops into a disease. Who, with unassuageable appetite passes on from book to book is worse than a drudge; he is in the way of becoming a slave to printed matter; his own individuality is lost among the alien spirits with whom he consorts. The other

kind of reader, who is afflicted with a devotion to some favourite author, and reads and re-reads his Shakespeare or his Goethe, his Sterne or his Walter Scott, his Burns or his Tennyson, who, instead of a fresh, crisp newspaper, has Edie Ochiltree to breakfast as often as he has eggs and toast, who carries a pocket Shandy when he takes an airing, and reads the 'Lotos Eaters' in his summer-house (when he might himself, like an epicurean god, look down on the human turmoil), is still more to be pitied. His analogue is the habitual playgoer who weeps on the fiftieth night exactly where he has wept forty-nine times before, or the countryman who, if dowered with Ayesha's gift of years, would still in his second thousand greet the clown's 'Here we are again' with the old burst of laughter. But we, *nous autres*—the eclectic *connoisseurs*—suck but sparingly from these flowers. A book is inferior to a circus horse in so far that it is a precisely mechanical toy. Though the tricks and capers, the gambols, stumbles, and falls of a circus horse are severely regulated and occur time after time in the same order, there is still, while he has life, the chance of his accidental deviation into novelty. Not so with a book. Turn over the leaves and you discover an action of as cast-iron regularity as an automaton or a musical box. People talk fondly of books as companions, but fancy a friend who every time you met him started in the same words, and pauses, and phrases, to recite the same rigmarole he knew by heart! But

the act is inevitable, says your critic. Pooh! nonsense. Suppose Mr. Steinitz the chess-player had published the single score of a game as he played it, and said, 'This is the one way to deal with the Ruy Lopez opening, white must invariably attack thus, black defend with that,' were the moves never so deep and crafty his most docile pupil would refuse to take his word that there are not others as subtle; for the game is susceptible of infinite variation. Yet critics continually assert that in the far more complicated game of life the man of genius sets down forced moves only, as if on the great chess-board the score of one game as written by a master were exhaustive. I find the main pleasure of books to arise not from conning over favourite poems or stories till I have them by heart, not from rummaging in the dust-heaps of literature, but from speculating about their possible variations. How could Shakespeare have solved his hardest problem without putting Polonius behind the arras? What would the 'Inferno' have been had Dante chanced to be a Puritan? To try and invent answers is like wooing the dead from Hades.

There are still simpler examples. Of all the poets who have tried, say, to concentrate the whole spirit of Autumn into a sonnet or a lyric, is there one who has succeeded so that we can point to his handiwork and say, 'There is the one autumnal song'? It is easy to answer with a negative, for the test is at hand. Morning after morning may be spent in the windy

fields and rustling woods, and though the hues of decay become gradually more brilliant, and the leaves dance before the breeze, and the hedgerows redden with hip and haw, and the squirrel is busy among the hazel nuts, dream and reverie travel on uninterruptedly, the present, the future, and the might-have-been blended in disorder. But to him who does not seek for it the poem comes at last, suggested perhaps by a trifle—a family of jays flying round the thicket with harsh cry and shining plumage, a flock of rooks tumbling in the October air, a party of gleaners in a neighbouring field. Instead of feeling then that ‘The Last Load Home,’ or any other poem, is an adequate summary of the suggested vision of work done, and the gathered harvest, and the inevitable moral, it does not convey a tithe of what the brook sings as, with soft and ceaseless lullaby, it flows past the village graveyard, where merry harvesters of a bygone time rest like garnered sheaves. No poem that ever was written gives more than a hint of the broken melodies sung by our Ophelia of the Ages moving on to her doom. Nature is always sad to those in communion with her ; and her love-making is but to find a listener for a tale of woe. Even in spring she seems to whisper ; the young lambs, the bourgeoning trees, the insects and the birds, all drain something from a not inexhaustible source, and are indeed but exudations of decay. With her utmost economy—and she flings even

dead bodies into the melting-pot for recasting—there must be a continual loss.

My reflections never take this turn save it be after the mind has been stupefied with too much reading and conversation, or as a corrective of what a bard has called ‘the wild joy of living ;’ the contemptuous simile of the elder moralist, ‘Ants on a dunghill,’ is not at all in it with them as a precipitant of that joy. But when they do, whether they stop at an idle musing lit up by a fancy, or travel on to the inmost root of sorrow, they form memories that serve as touchstones and measuring lines of poetry. No verse exactly expresses what the reader or the writer has felt, only a variation of it ; but whatever rings true will awaken or recall those moments of exquisite intimacy with Nature. If they are sad, so is everything else that is delightful ; all music is so ; the sea mourns along the beach and round her lonely islands ; the wind’s voice is at its sweetest a gentle dirge ; colours are not harmoniously blent till they produce a subdued pensiveness ; and there is a suggestion of grief in every fine and delicate odour.

It is an advantage of living in the country that it leaves little time for making even unwritten criticism. Every post brings material for a more charming occupation. You can tell from the grimaces and motions of his puppets whether the ordinary dramatist is intent on comedy or tragedy. His skill is exerted from the outset to produce an atmosphere suitable to result.

How the gloom grows and deepens over the 'Bride of Lammermoor!' What a light sparkles through every scene of 'The Tempest' or 'As you Like it'! But Nature is a shamelessly inconsistent playwright; or the finger of fate is hard to discern. There were two lovers whose marriage I felt sure had already been made in Heaven, and in whom one beheld the Baucis and Philemon of a long comedy. They blew hot and cold, loved and hated one another, fell out and became reconciled, were jealous and trustful, laughingly mocked and scolded without bitterness; in a word, played the old game as it has been played since the days of Adam. What a pothor when, before more than the prologue was spoken, my comedy was ruined by a railway accident in which the hero was killed, and I had to think out the obscure indications which showed that from the beginning a tragedy was inevitable. There was my modern St. Francis too, how pure and aspiring he was, how sure I felt of the effects of his love and eloquence! Yet he married a rich widow, and going into Parliament changed a well-imagined epic into burlesque. Ample atonement for mistake is offered by the delight of reconstructing the play.

Nevertheless there are times when for a space this ingenious puzzle and all its kindred amusements pall, and the mind, losing the activity that is essential to the full enjoyment of idleness, becomes torpid and irritable. Fled is all the poetry and the fun. The silly neighbour chases his soap-bubble as before, but

he is not followed by your cheery laughter ; it is out of your power to build castles in the air for anybody the wind pipes but fancy will not dance to it—the prattling of the brook is not listened to ; gone are the novels and plays of dreamland, and with them everything but the inane. To emerge triumphantly from that morass and slough of despond is a crucial test of philosophy. One man advises a run up to town, a look in at the theatre, a cosy dinner at your club ; and his counsel is not unworthy of regard ; another recommends you to drown care in the Lethe of a thrilling romance, while the child of nature says, ‘Drink in the atmosphere swathing the pine-trees, bask in the magical sunlight that plays on the mountain tops, rest you in the kindly lap of earth, thus will the dying red of your humour be fanned into flame again.’ But is there no better substitute than these for the harp of David when Saul is possessed by the evil spirit ? There is, and its name is Patience. Wait, and you will find that depression runs its course like a disease and leaves you merrier than before.

The insane sadness of one’s questioning moods causes a hunger for the oblivion of active employment. While your ploughman is labouring like his own horses, the mere happiness of gathering and dispersing force is enough for him ; at leisure he seeks forgetfulness in drink and opiates. Business, art, sport, literature, are but correlative avenues of escape from oneself, different forms of nepenthe. For it requires

much courage to be idle, to ripe and ripe in steadfast tranquillity, to rot and rot without flinching, to expand as calmly as the leaf, to wither as uncomplainingly as the flower. The dull workaday citizen plods wearily on his journey for so many hours, and sleep wafts him forward during so many more. Every sunset and sunrise sees him nearer the end, and in his humble way he is glad, not to be too ardently assailed by cold and hunger, to have some comfort at his hostelry, to reach death by easy stages. More fiery and strenuous souls angry at the slow and jogging pace spring to right and left in pursuit of three masked elusive figures they fain would make companions of. But Pleasure flies from her wooer and flouts him, Fame that frowns on lusty youth mocks bitter age with her embraces, and Wealth the prostitute makes him father of an evil offspring.

As the kindly spectator, whose dancing days are over, is visited in his overlooking balcony by many a ball-room queen with smiles she will not accord to the envious love-sick gallant, so he who contentedly from an outside vantage point surveys the world's chasing throng may in his cosy nook have many a vision of the damsels who are so shy to their declared and ardent lovers. They come in their simplest apparel, and when at his bidding they unmask, it is to disclose no proud and haughty beauty such as in their madness their frantic suitors have imagined, but sweetness, modesty, and simplicity, such as dwell only on the

pure face of a girl. Wealth I trow looks in but seldom, she has so many lovers ; and Fame not oftener, for the door is locked to her brazen-faced usurping sister Notoriety ; but Pleasure, the fairest of the three, is a constant visitor. She will sit by me for hours as I recall what constant playmates we were when children, and how she carried her boy lover to wood, and rill, and river, and romped with him on banks yellow with primroses, and among the meadow daisies and buttercups. ‘Do you remember the young thrushes on the banks of the leafy burn that divides the Dene?’ she will ask, or ‘Have you ever had such angling as when you and I caught our first minnows, and our very earliest perch swam forward with his red fins and took the bait?’ So she will prattle on for hours together, till I forget that I sit in an arm-chair by the fire, and am a boy again, wandering over stony fields above which the black and white pewits fly and shriek, or watch a red squirrel scale the beeches while the lazy cawing of the rooks floats down the air.

The sun sets as he used to, but with far more peace and glory and a multiplied wealth of golden clouds, and the summer wind blows sweet and faint. For there is nothing my enchantress cannot reproduce at will, from the ditch with its sticklebacks and the overhanging hawthorn where the greenfinches built, to the river, the ruin, and the ferry. And because of the alternately glowing and disappearing vision of these

things, I cannot see a child gathering the first violet of Spring, or laughing under Autumn's ruddy fruit-trees, without participating in his pleasure. For me again as for him the clouds are only dark and drifting, shadows diversifying the deep sky's beauty ; the winds blow and the rains fall for his and my amusement, and even the stormy tempests of Winter are a recreation. Though I and my generation pass, and the purpose of our having lived is still inscrutable, yet the bounding life of children, the unperturbed beauty of sunlight, the undivined mystery of existence, are sources of a hope that is the only prophylactic against despondency.

A FARMER'S NOTEBOOK

A VERY favourite calendar with country folks was 'Rider's British Merlin,' a work adorned with many delightful varieties and useful verities, fitting the longitude and latitude of all capacities within the islands of Great Britain and Ireland. The good compiler, one Cardanus Rider, was no niggard of his information. His geography extended from 'a true and plain description of the highways' to America 'which consisteth of those two parts Mexicana and Peruana ;' but chiefly he shone as a chronologist. Would you know the year which saw the flames rise from 'Gomorrow' or the Wooden Horse dragged into

Troy? He sets you down these delightful things, with hundreds more of the same minting. But mostly it may be supposed the eighteenth century bucolic would ponder the simple yet sage counsellings with which Cardanus embellished his pages. As that in January one must 'use meats that are moderately hot, for the best physick is warm diet, warm clothes, and a merry honest wife ;' but in July 'Perfume your chamber every morning with Tar upon a Chafing Dish of Coals.' John Nutt, Cardanus his printer, knew well that Farmer Giles was not likely to buy more than one copy in a lifetime, so had the book bound in strong brown leather, and it was still stout and serviceable after twenty years of pocketing.

It has been my luck to light upon a very interesting copy of this work. A gentleman farmer in Wiltshire, knowing me interested in such matters, produced it to show the rate of agricultural wages a hundred and fifty years ago. He found it under a staircase pulled down for repairs. With a pair of compasses, a foot-rule, and other pocket emptyings, it had been left in a corner and the masons had built it in ; cover and leaves are worm-eaten, and the ink is faded, but enough remains decipherable to show that it belonged to Henery Kemble, and how Henery Kemble used it. Henery's house was a very different affair from that one wherein his book was found. Tenant after tenant has built and enlarged till the cottage of 1700 is a goodly mansion. A filthy horse-

pond used to be where now are lawn, and rose garden, and vineries. Then, you must pull down the trellis and strip off the eglantine, uproot the shrubs, and cast away the gravel, before you can realise the bare thatched house of six or seven rooms as it stood in the beginning of last century. The farm buildings also have been metamorphosed ; though the old wheel granary is still there to remind one of old fashions. The very windmill is a new contrivance for pumping water. A century ago the farmer ground his corn at a watermill by the brook that hurries through the chalky combes. It is standing there yet ; but it has been turned into a couple of cottages. No cart road passes, and the grain to feed it must have been carried on pack-horses.

Henery Kemble, once the tenant of house, and mill, and farm, acquired his 'British Merlin' in 1711, 'being the third year after Bissextile or Leap Year,' and used it for jottings till 1739 ; so that this one almanac served him eight and twenty years. By that time there was no half-inch of paper without its note. The entries, of the most general design, are perhaps for that very reason much more interesting than the contents of a regular account-book. One may easily judge that Henery was a hob-nailed and unlettered Farmer Giles. That his dialect was the broadest Wiltshire is evident from his orthography :—'To noint cows oder' is one of his recipes ; he writes 'whoats' for oats, 'ackers' for acres, 'backon' for bacon ; and all through his

variegated orthography you may discern a leaning to the landward mode of utterance. As might be expected, his main concern is with his bestial. The mating of his black heifers and his red, of his ewes, and mares, and swine, is set down with punctilious care ; as is the cost of pasture and commonage for his ' pide ' cows and his sheep. From the number of recipes you would judge that he trusted little to the farrier. Nearly all are compounded from such well-known herbs as foxwort and dandelion, comfrey and Solomon's seal, wild carrots and stinging nettles. Here is an exceptional one—meant for human beings :—' Take a new laid eg and rost until the yoke will come forth whole and then open the eg then take as much burnt alam as will lay upon the top of the nif put it into the eg and bruse it together and straine it in a linen cloth for sore eyes.' Now and then you get a glimpse of the annotator from another point of view. He appears to have been the moneyed man of the parish, and certain entries show that at need he could stretch forth a helping hand : ' July 7, 1711, I Henery Kemble lend John Herring, the shopkeeper, fifty shillings.' Here and there are hints of market-day frolics : as, ' I Henery Kemble took up 2 pounds and 16 shillings of William Kemble, and put 11 ginis down in the same glass ' : a trick still practised in the neighbourhood. But such incidents appear to have been rare and surprising excursions out of the jog-trot road of husbandry.

There are items the economist will consider with

zest ; they throw some light upon the Payment of Labour Question in that eighteenth century which, according to Mr. Kebbel, was the golden age of agriculture : ' a broad rich plain lying between two volcanic ranges ; a happy valley rich in corn, and wine, and oil.' Put into figures this blessedness amounted (so far as Hodge was concerned) to eightpence or ninepence a day. ' John Gelt, his bill for work ' came to £2. 3s. 6d. for five weeks ; but this (8s. 8d. a week) appears to have been the highest wages Henery ever paid. Five and threepence for 7 days, three and sixpence for 6 days, two and tenpence for 3 days, and eightpence for a single day—such entries occur again and again at intervals within the twenty-eight recorded years. Nor was piecework better paid. ' john lea, his bill for mowing 11 ackers and a halve' was £0. 17s. 3d., but he had 2s. 6d. for ' one acker in the marsh.' John had evidently to sweat for his pound. Plowing, ' thrishing,' and mending of all sort were paid at eightpence a day. It would be a mistake to think that the money thus earned went very far. Here is what seems to have been the average rent for a cottage. It is a receipt that Henery, who committed himself to few documents, carefully copied into his note-book :—
' September 3, 1739, reseved of jonathan lea £2. os. od. to pound being one years rent dew at Micholmus last past i sai reseved by me Henery Kemble £2. os. od.' Ninepence a week is not much for a house ; but in point of fact it would now be held quite enough

for a hovel. And hovels these old Wiltshire cottages must have been. Many thousands of cottages are letting at a shilling a week ; in part of Wales the sum is sixpence ; on outlandish farms in Berks and Oxon cases occur where the labourer is mulcted in not more than fourpence-halfpenny. For a bushel of ' whoats ' Jonathan had to pay three and twopence, and submit to the moulture. ' William Kemble his bill for bakon ' came to 2s. 3d. for 4½ pounds ; and sixpence a pound appears to have been the common price.

Henery had an unfortunate method of so jotting down his payments that they could be of use to nobody but himself. Occasionally he seems to have been seized with a desire to reckon up his disbursements : and fills a whole page with the oddest items. He has paid 31s. 8d. for ploughing and 1s. 6d. for a new hat ; 16s. 3d. for ' bif ' and a halfpenny for lard ; and a debt of twopence is set down as punctiliously as one of twenty pounds. But, as the quantities are not mentioned, you cannot as much as guess at the cost of many important commodities.

MAKING EVEN

TWO phrases still recurrent under Henery Kemble's pen are a source of infinite amusement. They illustrate the countryman's reluctance to make full and

final settlement. In nineteen times in twenty, Henery gives the particulars of a bill, and the word that something is 'leaft to pay.' Sometimes you judge from the smallness of the amount—'leaft to pay 4*d.*,' 'leaft to pay 3*d.*,' 'Leaft to pay 1*d.*,' for example—that Henery must have suffered from a chronic lack of small change, but just as frequently the cause appears to be a mere dislike to settlement. Indeed, it would be a mistake to suppose that impecuniosity had anything to do with the matter; for it is plain that Henery was a 'warm' man, with a good deal of stock and no difficulty in finding money, whether to lend or spend. The 'grippy' small farmer made it a rule never to part with cash—if he could help it. Phrase the second is still more significant, in that it shows that Henery seems scarce ever to have paid wages outright. It is always '*I made even*' with Robert or Abram: with the additions now and then, 'and paid him in full £0. 5*s.* 0*d.*' Every possible bill was treated in like wise. Henery makes even with his cottagers' rent, 'dew at lady day last past,' with 'Miss Pamer' for his tithes, with 'An Solt' for the commons of his sheep. The expression is still in common use. 'But if farm labourers,' you ask of complaining village tradesmen, 'spend so much on beer, and dress, and cheap trips, and deal with you on credit, how do you live, and how do they manage to get out of their difficulties?' 'Why, we make even somehow,' is the answer: 'by taking a bag of potatoes, a cask of butter,

a sack of wheat, or anything else in kind.' Or Tummus, engaged for, say ten shillings a week, but out of cash and credit both at Michaelmas or Lady Day, marches up to his master, and in the great kitchen, the only sitting-room of farmers like Henery Kemble: and 'Please, muster, and axin' pardin,' Tummus says, 'but it be six months since last reck'nin', and I be wonderful short of brass, and if I could have a bit o' my wages, muster —.' To which Farmer Giles thus: 'Sartin it is, Tummus, thy money be dew. Wait, then, wile I get the book, and what I owe 'ee I'll pay.' (He gives a look at his ledger.) 'Drabbit, it comes to thirteen pounds, Tummus.'

TUMMUS (*all on fire*): 'Just the very money, muster!'

GILES F. (*deep in thought*): 'Ay, ay, Tummus, but something mun come off it, I'm sure. We *made even* last time by leaving the rent over: that's two pound, and then, Tummus, you had a sovran at Christmas; and ten shill'n for the fair brings it to 9*l.* 10*s.*, lad.'

TUMMUS (*still blazing*): 'Yes, muster, I reckon that be how it stands.'

GILES: 'Nay, but Tummus, thou does not think I can give thee meat and taters and cheese and milk and coals for nowt, does thee? Let me see now, meat fower pound, potatoes two pound, coals a sovereign, other trifles ten shill'n, rent two pound, why . . .'

TUMMUS (*quite extinguished*): 'Thou's countin' rent twice, muster!' (*They argue the point at length.*)

GILES (*with magnanimity, having floored his man*): 'That makes you owe me half-a-sovran, Tummus—counting the pig. So if you give I that, we can *make even.*'

TUMMUS (*angry and fallen, but powerless*): 'Nay muster, but I be wonderful short of brass, I be; and the missis when I tell her, her'll say "Go set," and "Here's a man for you, I'll be taken abed with the ninth next week, and the wastrel has drunk six months' wages in a night!" For her'll think I'n made this up.'

GILES (*heartily*): 'Why, dang me if I see thee beaten, Tummus; thou's worked well for me, lad, and I'll stand to thee. Thou owes me for the pigling, that's ten shill'n, and we'll let the rent stand over till next reck'nin', that's two pounds. Now if I gin thee thirty shill'n' and thou owes me the rent. And that *makes even*, dount it?' (*Scene closes.*)

. In this way, Tummus, with a debt of two pounds and cash in hand to the amount of one pound ten, would start upon another six months' term; at the end whereof he was pretty sure to be much in the same predicament. It may be deemed that the practice is obsolete, but it is not so. Old customs die very hard, and many forces tend to keep this one in being. Few can penetrate the mysteries of the cottage economics, or so much as guess at the contriving

and managing by which a family of six or eight is housed, and clothed, and fed, on some twelve to sixteen shillings a week. There is also a strong desire to abolish payment in kind. Full of new wants and inspired with new ideas in dress and cheap trimming, Tummus hungers for hard money. The agitator backs him ; and wherever there has been disturbance you shall find the bargain between employer and employed most rigid. And even County Court judges, weary of the bickerings arising out of payments made in kind, will often counsel a farmer to hire for cash. This is leading back to the old trouble. Let it be granted that the barter of labour for produce is rude and bad : that the worst imaginable form of contract was represented by the udal tenure (as it used to prevail in Orkney) under which a tenant paid a third of his crops as rent, and was prohibited from disposing of the rest excepting in exchange for goods supplied by the ' Fowd of the Parish.' But, in practice, if you pass to the other extreme and pay in money only, Tummus is very soon in hot water. The trade of farming is conducted on so fine a margin of profit that labourers are fully aware of the hopelessness of looking for any rise of wages. But their incomes will not stretch out to their requirements unless they advantage themselves by getting food at cost price. This poor Tummus speedily discovers. The store-keeper is as keen as himself for cash, and his prices are far above the farmer's. Soon or late, then, he

must go to his master, and ask for a sack of wheat, or a cheese, or a cask of butter at farm rates : the cost to be deducted from his wages ; whence the old pay-day struggle about *making even*. Any system of allotments that would do away with this were a boon indeed, but it is becoming more and more apparent that Tummus cannot and will not give his scanty leisure to the toil of cultivating anything larger than a moderate-sized garden. Farmers, on the other hand, are very willing to forego the regular engagement system, and to take their men on piece-work. Such labourers as believe they can make land pay should be perfectly content with the terms : whenever they may rent an acre of their own, and eke out their wages with the yield. In theory it is perfect, is it not ? But at the critical moment the farmer needs his Tummus, and his Tummus wants to be on his own allotment.

If Tummus only knew it, or rather if Tummus would forego his wretched yet to him most costly diversions—he would profit best by engaging himself for six months or a year, at moderate wages in money and a share in the crops. That would rid him of the poignant affliction of being sent home on rainy days and left with no work and no wages in midwinter ; and it would protect him from that trick of *making even* so long a scandal in the land.

THE HARDEST LABOUR

ONE of the shrewdest landowners in England, and a farmer to boot, asked of me once upon a time, 'Why torment yourself to account for Hodge's migration? Here,' he continued, 'is the secret in two words: it is hard work.' Pressed to explain, he said, as one uttering a truth there's no gainsaying, that no toil makes such trial of the muscles as the toil of agriculture, and that men who had been to school would not endure it. The statement impressed me, and I proceeded to make my oracle particularise. If agricultural work be the hardest there is, then what is the hardest agricultural work? At first he was inclined to give the palm to milking. 'But,' you object, 'is milking not the task of Phyllis, and Rose, and Tess of the D'Urbervilles? Does not the proposition involve the absurd contention that the average dairymaid is stronger than a coal-porter?' These flouts are premature. No one is going to contend that the maid that 'singeth blythe,' the be-hymned of Herrick and the beloved of Burns, is a Hercules in petticoats. But she would need to be that, or something like it, to fill the place of milker on a modern dairy-farm. It is nothing to look after Daisy and Queenie and Blossom, in the intervals of creaming, and churning, and baking, and the rest. It is otherwise when there is a whole

herd to be relieved, and it is milk, milk, milk, all the day long, till, never so strengthened with eelskin, the weary wrists will no longer bear up a pair of hands sore with cow-pox, the milkman's malady. Let the athlete try it for a day, and he is like to admit ere nightfall that till then he never knew what hard work was.

And this is not the hardest. My friend is a very strong man, and one of the lightest of drinkers withal. Out shooting you cannot tire him. I have seen him come home as fresh as paint after tramping over all sorts of soils, and after carrying a heavy bag for part of a day that lasted from ten in the morning until dusk. Well, one hot June day he undertook to go out with the mowers at five, and work in moderately heavy clover till six at night. He won his bet, but he vows that the experience surpassed his worst surmises. He drank a clean gallon of strong beer, with another of cider ; and, save that he still felt thirstier, the liquor had no effect on him ; and for more than a week he was so stiff and sore that he could hardly walk. Yet he is no carpet-knight, no lisping epicure, but a hale and burly English gentleman, excellent with the gloves, a great wrestler, a proper man of his hands all round. No doubt 'the sweep of scythe in morning dew' is a charming sound, but there is not much poetry in the act of expending the force that furnishes the song. And, in brief, as milking is the most irksome, so is mowing the most laborious of rural tasks.

Yet an experienced old rustic has told me that the sorest bones he ever did have were got at a washing. It is a delightful scene : A glassy river winding round a broad flat meadow golden with buttercups ; a drooping and branchy green willow ; thigh-deep in the pool, three sturdy bumpkins at regular distances ; a wattled pen full of sheep ; and, ever and anon, some rustic haling one of them into a little passage, and forcing it to jump a bank into the water. Washer the first catches the creature swimming, turns it on its back, sways it hither and hither upon the water, and then shoves it on to washer the second, who, almost in midstream, enacts a similar performance, and passes it on to the third washer, who is somewhat closer to the bank : whereafter the poor beast clambers, white, and dripping, and bleating, up the bank. Now, my informant asserts, and one cannot help believing it, that there is no labour under the broad heavens more frightfully tiring than that of the man on the bank, with a big flock of obstinate old ewes to handle. It looks like sport ; but to go on for hours, catching sheep after sheep and compelling them into the river, is to strain every muscle and sinew in the body.

One other act of husbandry—that of tossing hay or a heavy crop of wheat or oats, may compete for difficulty with any. When leading-time comes, the farmer hands the fork to his strongest harvester ; an elderly man, whose fame as a builder of stacks ex-

tends to the utmost confines of the parish and beyond, mounts the rick ; a robust young woman is appointed to hand him up the sheaves. Age only adds to the builder's reputation and experience ; but the tosser must have youth and strength and endurance. Of those who read this probably not one in twenty has ever forked a stook in his life, or knows how much strength it takes to toss a heavy sheaf of corn up to the top of a long cart three parts loaded ; in which case not one in twenty knows what is the hardest work in the world. An hour of it is enough to break down the stoutest amateur ; yet it is often done at railroad speed. The man with the fork is proud of his place ; and when the farmer, anxious to get his carrying done as speedily as may be, comes in the morning and says, ' Now, my lad, there'll be an extra drink o' beer if the Forty-acre's in to-night,' he smiles a grim smile, flings off his coat and vest, sticks his little cap on the back of his head, and forks the sheaves into the cart at such a rate that he overwhelms the driver, drowns him, so to speak, in corn and straw, and blinds the on-looker to the strain on wrist and shoulder. There is knack in forking, but it is hard work at the best. A great deal of energy *must* be expended in lifting and throwing the sheaves. Stone-breaking is another matter. Done by a lone old man by the wayside, it seems a most wearisome, monotonous, and tiring drudgery : in reality, it is a calling wherein an apparently feeble and exhausted oldster

is often able to beat his lusty grandson. The secret consists in looking where you strike. A vast amount of force is wasted, when all that is needed is a clever tap. Road metal is easily broken up if you study grain and edges and seams.

Some country tasks, as driving horses or machinery, are light enough ; but the most are difficult and hard. No enthusiast, however fired with the love of rural life and rural labour, ever persists for any length of time. Digging, ploughing, draining, hedging and ditching, reaping, and sowing—all these are interesting to watch, all these are very wearisome to do. And the bucolic mind has somehow found this out.

CARTING THE BEES

WHAT the death of his first trout, his first appearance in a cricket match, or his first ride to hounds on his own Shetland pony, is to the Squire's son, that his first journey with the bees is to the village lad in remote north Northumberland. If you pass by a cartshed on a wet day, you will sometimes hear the urchins under its shelter bragging to one another like the rival chiefs in a council of redskins. 'I've been in a railway train,' says one. 'But you never saw the sea!' retorts a second. 'And you've never been with the bees!' triumphantly crows the third. And that

settles the matter. The boy who has been to the Cheviots has won his spurs—has begun to be a man : for, indeed, it remains an event to the strong young village bachelor of twenty-five or so, and even the arch ne'er-do-weel who commands the expedition anticipates it not without a thrill. He, too, is a bachelor ; for, somehow, when a man is married he loses taste for these adventures. You seldom find individuality in a married rustic. As soon as he goes to the altar he perishes, so far as oddity and character are concerned.

There is no lack of volunteers to carry the bees to the hills ; for the transference should take place in one of the quiet interludes in rural labour—that which comes between the hay and the corn harvest ; for the heather blooms on the hill exactly at the time when the oats begin to yellow. The custom is common in those parts of England, Scotland, and Wales that lie too far away from the stretches of heather for the bees to fly to them from their usual stances. The bee-keeper expects two harvests from his little workers, one from the plains, the other from the Cheviots. The first is gathered almost exclusively from the white clover and bean blossom ; and when these are past the bees would be reduced to idleness but for the expedient of carrying them to the hills. Otherwise, as may be proved by weighing the hives, the bees are forced to begin drawing on their capital—in other words living on their winter hoard—early in August. Of course this does not apply universally,

the conditions varying with the character of the agriculture. The bee man has a second reason for making the change. Flower honey, although the most beautiful and delicious, is not the best for the market, as owing to a want of consistency in the wax it runs easily and loses appearance. For that reason, bee-keepers will sometimes put on an 'eke' instead of removing the 'top' of flower honey; an 'eke' being a narrow band of plaited straw introduced between the 'top' and the 'skep,' to enlarge the store-room of the bees. If this is done, the insects, which seem aware of the defect in flower-wax, will reseal the 'top' with what they get from the heather and entirely change its appearance.

The transference takes place at night. As soon as darkness has driven the busy workers home their egress is stopped by sheets of perforated tin, and the skeps are packed in a long or harvest cart. Probably there are several loads; for the thrifty shepherd from the farm, the boatman from the ferry, and half a dozen other individuals from various out-of-the-way cottages have joined together to make a convoy. And now the procession gets under way. The two boys selected for the honour of their first journey are ensconced in a half-empty cart, wherein also are the whisky flasks of their elders. Happy are the old hands if the night is inclined to be chilly or even wet, for in close weather there is a danger of the bees

getting smothered, or of the honey running and drowning them.

At first everything goes pleasantly ; the road is smooth, the horses fresh. Much bee-talk is spoken : talk of giant swarms, of prodigious tops of flower honey, of runaway hives charmed back with the music made with a pair of tongs and a frying-pan ; of adventures in the old time, when the journey was made on foot or with ' a cuddy and creels ' ; of mishaps on the road ; and how one year horses were stung so that they jumped over a precipice and killed all who were with them, and how more than once the ' maut has got aboon the meal,' and horses and men have when daylight came found themselves lost in a bog. But after awhile the smooth Roman road has to be abandoned, and the going becomes worse and worse. At last it is only a rut through the fields, and boys and men are shaken and jolted as the wheels rise over immense stones or sink into deep holes. When morning breaks the carts are crawling along a stony road on the side of the green Cheviots—wooded with birch and fir—to the tops of which the drifting clouds seem tied with waving threads of mist. The cart-rut, overgrown with heather and bracken, passes by the side of a tiny burn which now seems but a series of mossy stones with a clear pool at intervals, yet will be big enough by-and-by. Until about the year 1878, when the last of them fell a prey to the bird-stuffer, golden eagles might have been seen in the early morning

circling over their prey ; and peregrine falcons and ravens from Henhole and corbies from Harrow Bog still pursue their daily hunt, indifferent to the traveller.

But a great barking of dogs proclaims that Goudsleugh has at last been reached. The 'herds' are cutting the grass in a little green patch of field—for vegetation is behindhand at this altitude—but they hasten up at that event in the glen, the advent of a stranger. The tired horses are unyoked, the skeps placed on the stances—rented at about half a crown each—in an old sheepfold surrounded by a dry-stone dyke, and the hospitable wife is soon regaling her guests with a repast of oatcakes and mountain milk. Meanwhile the bees, having been freed, do not show themselves half as much disturbed as a family newly removed to the seaside. A crowd of them rush out and hum and bustle round the doorway of their thatched house, and it may be assumed that the year's swarms—the bee children, so to speak—feel a little bewildered ; but, being altogether of a practical turn of mind, they soon join the immense flight of bees—a thousand hives have been counted in the same fold—which is passing to and fro between their homes and the field of heather. In less than half an hour the workers are to be seen returning to the hives laden with honey. During the next fortnight—for the best of the heather harvest will be over after that—their assiduous toil will never cease save on account of bad weather. Dewy nights and sunny days are the best.

Rain is disastrous, as it washes the honey from the heather. A strong hive will in one good day add between four and five pounds to the weight of the skep. In return for a consideration the shepherd will keep an eye on the hives, and perhaps send a message down the glen if the tops become too heavy and the hives threaten to swarm to obtain more room—an event that occasionally happens. With astonishing gravity old Sandy, the leader of the expedition, will lay his commands on the temporary custodians while the horses are being yoked for the return journey and the boys recovered—for they went guddling trout in the burn and lost themselves.

With similar rites and ceremonies the bees are brought home again ; but that is not until the harvesters have carried home the kirn dolly ; till the corn-stacks are being sheathed in their covering of straw ; till the blackening potato-tops are inviting the digger, and the ruddy-cheeked apples are glowing amid the many-tinted orchard leaves. It is a good time with the peasants, for the summer's labour is over, harvest wages have been earned and paid ; nothing more than a generous return of honey is needed to crown the year's good luck. It is in speechless excitement, however, that they in the autumn moonlight grope their way, each man to his own hives, and lift them with an anxious heart ; for bees are capricious servants, and till he feels their weight the owner cannot guess whether they have gathered for him a

doctor's bill or a year's rent or have been quite unprofitable. If the season has been dry and fine, and thirty pounders are plentiful, the autumn moon will shine on a happy group of faces, and the long road by the college and past dark Hethpool will tire no merry heart; but if otherwise, a dolorous party will start homewards through the bog and the mist. Next day begins the division of the spoil; and then does he who was most careful with his feeding during the preceding winter reap his due reward, for his virgin swarms will have produced the tops which the Squire and the rector and the doctor and the factor are anxious to buy. But he who doled out his boiled beer and sugar as though it were molten gold will have but scanty eight and ten pound hoards, fit only for the cadger or the grocer. Very likely, too, he will have to smoke his skeps with dried fungus, so as to make strong hives by throwing two or three into one. Yet even that unthrifty process has its compensation. It promises enough honeycomb to satisfy the children, and a store besides, out of which the good wife makes mead that will be good to drink when the merry toilers that provided it are fast asleep under the snow wreaths of Christmas.

LOWRIE'S GAP

ONE sunny day I sat on a log smoking and idly noting the characteristic features of a Border scene. A foaming little river (a tributary of Tweed) came dancing down between rocky scaurs, whose red was spotted white with pigeons, fled thither from the dovecot at the farm, and crowned with the oaks and elms of an ancient forest dear to Sir Walter. Had I deliberately sought a place of ambush, I could have found no better than I had chosen by accident. A slope, a screen of leaves, and an arm of the river—all these combined to conceal me from the champaign through which the water bickered further down; and thus it befel that the two unsoaped, ragged vagabonds that came strolling along the bank recked not of a witness. Suddenly (but after one quick glance round), the elder climbed a tree, while his junior crossed to the other side. As he approached, I saw that he had unpocketed a big fish-hook, with a stout string and a weight; and when the watcher aloft began calling, 'Weel ower, Wully; canny, now, canny; yont a bit,' and the like, the business of these ignoble sportsmen was no more matter of conjecture. In a very few minutes the director shouted, 'Now, pull!' and, with a sharp jerk and a haul, out came a wriggling, glittering salmon, infamously hooked in the side. Nor was this the end. The sportsman on the tree—

whom I knew as the hardiest, merriest, and most daring of Border wastrels—was (literally) chortling in his joy when his bough broke, and down he splashed into the water. In itself his mishap was trifling, for the place is not deep ; but as he fell a projecting rock got in the way of his head, and so ‘davered’ him that he would have stood a fair chance of drowning if I had not come out and pulled him ashore. He recovered easily enough, and ‘Wully’ explained what had happened, when he considered me with great suspicion, and ‘You look d——d respectable,’ he said. I laughed, for I knew what was coming. ‘Eh, hewl!’ he shouted, ‘it’s the chap collar’d me at Lowrie’s Gap twa year syne, and then begged us aff. Man, what the deevil are ee daein’ here?’ Now, Lowrie’s Gap is the name of a field on the other side of the Border, a good thirty miles from where we stood. It belongs to a friend of mine, with whom, as a matter of fact, I had sat up one night, when I had helped him to capture this particular poacher, who had been released on a solemn promise that a certain estate should not exist for him henceforth. I myself had read the rascal a forcible homily on the iniquity of promise-breaking after such a course of treatment ; and ‘You might as well tear a bit of paper in two, and expect it to work like a charm,’ said my friend. The event was with him. During subsequent seasons, this and many an English estate was raided from the little towns over Tweed ; and Watty, howbeit he keeps clear of the

common gang, has been one of the most active and persistent offenders.

A realistic novelist would paint a most heartrending picture of this same poacher. He lives in a den—you cannot call it a room—whose only furniture is a three-legged stool, a crazy table, and a big iron pot. He has not lain in a bed since childhood, but in summer he sleeps at an old dyke-back in a thick plantation, and in winter at any bieldy corner. If it be extremely cold he keeps himself warm by standing against the hot walls of the gas-works of the little town that numbers him as an inhabitant. As to clothes, he has none in particular. ‘What do you do when you get wet?’ I asked him; and ‘Just wait till I’m dry again,’ was his reply. Yet the old ruffian (he is over sixty) has never had a touch of rheumatism or a day’s illness in his life. For his diet, it may not be described without offence to ears fastidious. ‘Then,’ you think, ‘his poaching can come to very little?’ But it is not that. Doubtless he sells his game dirt cheap; but, if he had a spark of the saving instinct, he would be better off than any skilled labourer. His is a case of lightly come, lightly go—of coming by the fife and departing by the drum. Once, by unexampled luck, he came to be lord and master of a five-pound note one Christmas Eve; he at once exchanged it for a cask of whisky, and on New Year’s Day he was comparatively sober, and had not a drop to call his own. Again, it is said that for three con-

secutive months he has been known to live—save for one poor twopenny loaf—exclusively on liquor. He is so free-handed, that if you gave him the run of a whole Mansion House Fund, it would be all the same in a week. Yet ‘miserable’ and ‘wretched’ are the last terms you could ticket his life with. There are few indeed into whose hours so much of happiness is crowded. If he be ever gloomy, it is only when he is hungry or athirst. Let him fill his belly, and he is himself again. Nor is he destitute of a certain love of Nature: ‘Man, it was fine to hear the wind soughin’ amang the trees again,’ he said, after his last spell in gaol. But he cannot read; he has neither friends nor belongings; therefore, he knows nothing of care or thought or conscience. A laughing temperament has made him master of his fate.

The last time I saw him was in October on a moonlight night. I was out late on a lonely bridle-path across a flat Northumbrian moor; stopping at a sort of No-Man’s-Land to note the midnight beauty of the broad, long range of the Cheviots, the mighty shadows, and the deep valleys, I was aware of a glimmer of fire through a dark plantation. I marched up, and there was my poacher gazing into the red embers of a wood fire, crooning an amatorious ditty and watching a roughly spitted rabbit as it roasted. ‘Now, lads, run in on him,’ I cried, as I had been a keeper directing his assistants. The old man flourished a stout cudgel; but on second thoughts he

let it drop. 'Na, na,' he said; 'I'm a peaceable man, and atween the mairches. It'll be waur for him that first strikes.' Then I came on laughing, and 'Dod, it's ee again, is't?' he said, 'it's weel I didna land ye a clout on the cruntle.' Whereupon I squatted on a blown branch and made much of him. He brought out a bottle and a crust of bread, not without an hospitable offer to share, and fell to on the rabbit; and, being honourably entreated, and fully satisfied that I was on no 'splore' that would peril his operations, he grew confidential. He showed me his ferret (his sole companion), and the home-made nets he used with it. He explained how he fed the pheasants by a cover and then caught them in such horse-hair nooses as these. He brought out the hook he kept in readiness for a providential salmon. In a word, he plucked the heart out of his mystery. He vowed, too, that he had always kept—and meant to keep—away from the neighbourhood of Lowrie's Gap; but he is thought to have gone there the very next day. At all events, the birds vanished, and he was seen thereby. So I yield the honour of converting him—the wild man of the woods that he is—to some more vigorous and persuasive missionary.

SEPTEMBER IN THE WOODS

AS SOON as foliage begins to lose its first bright vernal freshness, the first glory of colour passes into shades of dark green. Ere June is ended the blossoms of hawthorn and orchard are almost gone, and the green fruit is indistinguishable amid the green leaves. The springing corn darkens and so does the clover that awaits the scythe, while the very wild flowers are hidden by the tall rank weeds. But in harvest time the earth begins to glow with new tints, and the woodland glades never are prettier than in September.

Autumn has not yet donned its myriad-coloured dress, but is busy in the making of it. The delicate beginnings of decay are everywhere visible. On the elms are patches of bright yellow that in the course of a few weeks will spread all over them. The oak, whose acorns are now full and almost ripe, is showing a light brown that reminds you of premature grey hairs on a young head, and the beeches, too, have just begun to wither, while the chestnuts, as if grief-stricken, are well advanced to the condition that precedes their winter poverty. As you walk in the solitary paths inside the wood, ever and anon in the stillest weather a solitary leaf is detached and like a brown moth flutters downward to your feet. Here and there one has caught in the gossamer festoons,

‘fine nets of scorched dew,’ hung everywhere by the spider and dangling in mid-air. The hardy birches have aged so slowly the process is hardly noticeable. The Lady of the Wood is a little more portly and matronly of aspect than in her girlishly slender days, when her green and fluttering June dress was the prettiest of the forest, but there is as yet nothing in her looks to suggest the advance of winter.

The hardy shrubs of the woodlands suffuse them just now with the daintiest colours. Even the eccentric gorse, whose gold a few months ago burnished the glades, is in some places showing autumn flowers of lighter hue. In corners where the may bloomed most prodigally, the hawthorns are reddening with a fruit that later on will be prized by the birds; and the pickers, who are busy filling their baskets with bramble berries, leave only those that are russet. Growing by their side are tall ferns already showing an occasional dead or yellow leaf amid their greenery. As the prevailing colour is dark and heavy, the hues require a degree of sunshine for display; but of that September is no niggard, and it flowers the grassy carpet under the trees with a leafy design done in light that in itself lends a charm to a walk in the forest.

At no other season of the year does the woodland appear more populous with bird life. Earlier in the season the birds were engaged in family and domestic duties and lived in deep seclusion; when they were not

tending their nests they were hunting food for themselves or their offspring; but in September every householder of the forest is the head of a grown-up family. There are more birds now than at any other time of the year, for of all those broods it is astonishing what a small percentage will survive the ravages of winter. It is with them as with the oak that bears a million acorns of which perchance not one will become a tree, or with the fish that deposits several hundred thousand eggs in a season without sensibly adding to the population of the river. Ere nesting time comes again, boys and birdcatchers, net and trap, weasel, hawk, and disease, frost, snow, and farmer, will have slain these songsters by the hundred. Nature carries on the living world at a huge cost in bloodshed and suffering.

The characteristic bird of the forest is in autumn, I think, the jay. He is growing very scarce in many places, for keepers give him short shrift on account of his egg-stealing propensities; yet he is so active and amusing, and the number of our brightly-coloured birds is so small, that one would like to crave some quarter for him. In September I see dozens of them in the woods, but not very clearly, for if the jay catches sight of anyone approaching the oak under which he is foraging, he rushes into the thicket with a flash of his blue and white feathers and a harsh cry like that of a crow before nesting time. The shriek which is taken up in this tree and in that, and a flying and

fluttering and hurrying, tell that the first was no solitary wanderer. In the early part of the season the jay keeps to the thickest and most secluded portions of the wood, building where it is almost impenetrable. When his family are able to fend for themselves he grows bolder and his cry is the most familiar of the forest.

Another bird very much to the fore in September groves is the little tit—the ox's-eye, as country folk indiscriminately call both the tiny blue and the cole titmouse. One has no idea what numbers of these active and pretty little birds are near at hand till accidentally, as it were, one of them is discovered. You notice the great overgrown ferns by a thicket of hawthorn and wild rose swaying and moving in the windless air, till you expect a hare or a rabbit to jump out, but instead you catch sight of the white ear of a titmouse as it is busy among the insects on the semi-decayed frondage. It sees you too, and it and a little wren hurry off simultaneously. The wren flits softly away without a chirp or any audible rustle of its small wings: not so the bold and ill-tempered titmouse; it swears vigorously at you while leaving, and it is answered by a volley of oaths from the lichened branches of the crab, from the rotting leaves of the elm, and from oak and ash, till the grove seems alive and the sober foliage tinted with the plumage of titmice.

Startled by the clamour a stoat crosses the wood-

land path, and you may follow it to its hole a hundred yards off by merely listening to the rustle of dead leaves. Indeed, this is a signal worth attention, for it shows that the stoat did not go straight home but, like a Red Indian scouting an enemy, skirted from cover to cover—from the ferns to a bunch of nettles, thence to a horrent elm-root, crossing from that to where a holly's low leaves rest on the grass, and so to its citadel. The same noise betrays the snake slyly gliding away from the sunny opening where he was asleep, the pheasant trotting along its high-road through the ferns, the squirrel amassing his hoard, the woodmouse playing hide-and-seek below a mushroom.

If you walk about quietly and alone in a forest where wild deer run, you may have opportunities to see the 'dappled fool' to as good advantage as Jaques. The doe comes down the green rides with her easy springing gallop that carries her away like a dark shadow under the loose and melancholy boughs. Sometimes you may watch her for a long time as she is feeding, but her majestic, wide-antlered mate is more wary. At a single suspicious noise or movement his ears are pricked, and if frightened he is off like a thunderbolt, making splendid leaps over fallen trunks and low boskage; but if only slightly alarmed he trots gently off till his form is lost among the dark limbs and waving branches of the forest.

LITTLE DUES OF CORN

IN the close, hazy days of early autumn, when the morning sun glistens mildly on hedges netted with dewy gossamer, and the grass is damp till noon, a kind of soft, contented, half-melancholy joyfulness seems to get into the very air. The earth is at rest after her annual labour, and from her teeming basket pours forth food to her children, and a lazy, idle happiness is announced by the very rooks as they leisurely flap from the meadow to the potato-field or caw to one another on ash or elm. Trees in the quiet air stand sleepy and still as in a trance, all wrapped in long brown cloaks that daily grow more yellow, and a few are splendid in a jewellery of red berries. Wild plantations are almost impossible to traverse, for luxuriant vegetation is at its height—nettles and burdocks, brambles and wild briars, creepers and climbers, all the dense undergrowth of the wood, have raised their stems and hung their tendrils everywhere; and only an almost imperceptible fading, a slight blanching of the green, tells that Nature has spoken her 'Thus far and no farther' to them. Already the sharp morning frosts are arresting the flow of their sap. Some of them will die like the insects thoughtlessly fluttering about them, and be replaced by sproutings from the grains of seed that bird or wind has borne from place to place; some,

like the squirrel who is storing the hazel nut, will sleep through the frost ; and only a few, like the holly, will brave the snow in a dark-green mantle.

A music sweeter than any bird's song rings from copse and thicket ; for children, whose ruddy faces are tanned with exposure to the hot suns of summer and stained with the juice of blackberries, are laughing with glee and triumph as they crush through the tangle of weeds and shrubs to rifle the hazel bush and bramble of their treasures, stopping every now and then to rush hopelessly after a rabbit that bolts to its burrow, or pelt one another with fungus torn from the rotting elm. Some are only for pleasure, but many that a little may be added to the simple store a widowed mother or disabled father is preparing against the privations of winter. On their brows, however, care sits lightly. The field-mouse does not fill his little granary with a blither heart than do these gather for the humble larder, and all the rest of the year they anticipate with pleasure these autumnal roamings. Close up to the Wolds a line of crab-trees, allowed to grow as a shelter for the sheep, is their orchard ; and it is good to see them climbing and shaking the gnarled boughs, laughing as they cram the bitter fruit into bag or pillow-slip, or wearing themselves out with fun till they are hardly able to toil home under their burdens. Yet next morning, shortly after the misty daybreak, they will be seen quartering the hilly old pastures for mushrooms.

Among the residents of the hamlet is a thriftless jobbing labourer, whose household is almost maintained by pilferings from Nature. The pig in his sty is always the fattest, yet in summer it was fed only on boiled nettles and fresh dock-leaves, and in autumn by acorns picked from under the wayside oaks. A bunch of dried sage from a corner of the garden serves for tea, and against times when there is no money for tobacco, he has preserved the great leaves of the 'dish-a-laggy' wherewith to fill his pipe, and he declares that its smoke is pleasant and wholesome. His wife will at Christmas time produce a choice of drinks from her cupboard, mead brewed from the old black unsaleable honeycombs, wine made from the dark fruit of the elderberry, or the white bitter milk of the dandelion, and prides herself on the ketchup seasoned with her own mint and marjoram and other garden herbs. The children hardly ever taste butter, but they prefer the excellent substitutes provided in the shape of preserved wild fruit. Although there is no house in the district where ready money is scarcer or the income less, the most selfish relative does not shun the cottage, for at short notice the hospitable dame, who has tame rabbits and pigeons and one or two fowls at her command, will provide a dinner fit for the best, though the pot is boiled by blown wood and her bread was picked up from the bare stubble. In spring, the waterhen, the peewit, and the black-headed gull provide fresh eggs for them, while many a dainty pie

is filled with unfledged cushats, young wild duck taken—in defiance of the Acts of Parliament—from the bog, and succulent young squirrels from the plantation. Add to all the legitimate spoils of the rod, the whitlings and bull trout, and even salmon, killed by the father; the yellow and speckled trout, the perches, eels, and small jack, taken by the boys with rough wands and tailor's thread, and crooked pins; and, as must be added, a quantity of illegitimate booty from gun and snare, consisting mostly of rabbits, with a few hares, and an occasional pheasant or partridge; and it will be understood why food is so abundant in the house of a man oftener seen at the public-house than at his work. Yet were the household removed to town it would speedily be submerged among 'the lapsed masses.'

The avocations of city and commercial life blind those who pursue them to their dependence on and alliance with Nature. It makes them forget that all their great offices, and shops, and bazaars, ships, railways, and canals, their companies, and mart and exchanges, are but complications and compoundings of man's simple and primitive calling, to sow the seed and reap the harvest. In the hazy thin autumnal sunshine, he who looks on a quiet rural landscape will hardly avoid feeling with renewed freshness the force of this strong elemental truth. Look down on that brown white field wherefrom the high-piled cart has borne the last dry shocks of wheat; in one corner of it

a flock of pigeons is greedily feeding on the dropped grain, one amorous cock bird alone neglecting it to flirt his tail and blow out his crop and bow and coo to an assiduous hen ; in another there is a band of gleaners equally industrious, traversing the land with bent backs and downcast eyes, foot by foot and ridge by ridge, wretched and poverty-struck old women for the most part, gathering like the bird a precarious sustenance from the land, like the semi-dormant animals laying up a little store for the winter. To me that natural and simple process is typical and emblematic of all human industry. In the case of the poor gleaner the problem is as simple as may be, for it is only how to keep body and soul together in the hard times that are coming ; the only miracle is that the preservation of life should concern her at all, since continued existence means for herself so many more days of care, and want, and pain ; yet as long as the dying spark shows a gleam of red she will nurse and fan it more carefully than the imaginative young girl to whom the years that are to come melt into a bright landscape of flowery meadow where she is to wander happily culling bud and blossom. Her aged friend has tested and destroyed that hallucination. The sky lowers and storms blow on the last black stage of the journey, yet she would not shorten it by an inch, and nevertheless when the end does come, will lie down as happily as a child going to bed, in the quiet hostelry of death. Without knowing why, she is as obedient

as a soldier to the laws that govern life. Nature gave her a jewel to guard, and she watched over it vigilantly and well, like a dog that guards his master's coat as long as a particle of strength remained, and when the Giver asked it back she willingly made the surrender.

The man who is able to give his cheque for thousands has no higher task, though he has so bombasted and inflated it that recognition is hardly possible. Unborn generations are a care to him as though he would fain live the lives of his issue. Like a man that is insane, he has conjured up around him a circle of dark cares that are as fatal to pleasure as the horrible menacing shapes that mow at the old woman. It is, I think, in the sober mean, that has extreme wealth on one side and dire poverty on the other, that the most rational form of life is. One would hardly desire to fritter away the small allowance of time in the distracting cares of wealth, and still less in that naked and rude poverty wherein it is a cause for solicitude lest even the little due of wheat should fail. But of two evils the latter is the more supportable.

WINTER



MEMORIES

BEFORE the lamps are lighted on a Winter night, while yet the distant woods are visible in the last streaks of daylight, and the blackening train of crows are hurrying to cold perches on the oaks, when a breeze that is herald of storm begins to moan in the shrubbery and about the chimney stacks, and when one is wearied with out-of-door exercise, the blazing fire and its shadows offer a pressing invitation

To muse and brood and live again in memory
With those old faces of our infancy
Heaped over with a mound of grass
Two handfuls of white dust shut in an urn of brass.

It is, I confess, only an idler's amusement, for strong and ambitious minds at such moments live far more in the future than in the past. Scott has told us how during early life he was in hours like these a dreamer of strange adventures wherein he was always hero, and it was on such a night that 'with an elder sister's air'

Coila passed into 'the auld clay biggin' and bound her favourite's head with holly. Indeed, there is hardly anything sweeter to hear of than the hope and fancy of a fair young ambition ; for in that airy and graceful form it is more beautiful than any realised career. It is pleasanter, more stirring and suggestive, and far more profitable (except to the cynic) to picture the eager boy student Carlyle breathing as his inmost desire the hope of literary fame than to hear the aged and unhappy philosopher of Chelsea vituperating the 'goose-goddess' whose favours he had found so unreal. What a contrast there is between the gentle aspirant of Coate, out-of-elbows, out-of-luck, confidently foreseeing a laurel crown, and the dying celebrity wistfully living again the hours from which his dreams had been an escape.

Life rigidly confined to the present would be unbearable. On a journey what an exquisite and romantic charm resides in the landscape before us ; how the lakes gleam and nestle among the woods, how silvery white the streams, what a glory on the hill-tops ! When we approach the magical beauty fades away. The cold ripples of the water, the bleak grass of the mountain, alone of all the hazy ineffable charm remain to mock enthusiasm. We look behind, and lo ! the last gleam has settled there. Every common hedgerow and tree, the winding road, the copse in the hollow, the spinney on the hillside, have been arranged into a picture that makes you grieve for having left

a land so fair. In youth fantastic lights and signals are seen beckoning us to strange and undiscovered countries which most of us strive in vain to reach, though we may win near enough to see that the glamour was a mere effect of shade and distance, and the land is one where no pleasure is. Then we learn how we have gone forth from a kingdom of romance, whose beauty is now revealed with such vivid and intense brilliance as makes every little blue flower and every happy moment of it shine as they did on opening sense. As the future narrows to a thin and diminishing space between us and the dark ledge that borders life, the wayfarer is concerned, not with the black abysmal mystery he is approaching, but with things that have long gone by, incidents on the sunny highway of his early journey. The unbidden memories that throng in on a Winter twilight are they that come again in the Winter of old age.

Were it possible, nothing could be more suggestive than to compare the detailed map and history of a patriarch's life with the savings from it caught by the sieve of memory. The choice is as arbitrary as that of the jackdaw, who stores a useless tuft of horsehair as carefully as a purloined jewel. Some men may, indeed, by concentrating the mind upon a single train of thought, partly modify the natural eclecticism of recollection so that a Napoleon dies adream of battle and a Goethe asking for more light, while there are those who weep over the evil they have done and those

who rejoice over the good ; but when I think over the incidents and scenes that come back often and involuntarily, I find no preponderance either among those that were full of joy or pregnant with sorrow, that were absolutely trivial or intensely interesting. There is something from each, and all are now raised to an equal importance, all bathed in the same mild light, all enhaloed with the same quiet and pleasing melancholy. The grassy cradle among the hills whereon one summer day the beauty of earth first dawned on me is not a whit more vividly remembered than a non-significant village scene that for no discoverable reason the mind holds fast—a pouring rain, a tame magpie washing itself in a pool, a girl's voice singing ' Villikins and his Dinah.'

So too with faces. On no principle of selection, but, as would appear, from the simple operation of chance, a thousand have faded away for one that is added to the mental picture gallery. An early play-mate is forgotten, and the face of a stranger of which the merest glimpse has been caught in a crowded street is treasured for ever. In my case the apostolic features of an old grey clergyman when they reappear always bring with them the stolid face and cunning eyes—half-concealed by the dinted white hat partly tilted over them—of a rascal horsey poacher, and those of a one-legged drunken saddler who was an adept at dressing fly-hooks. Memory has no care to keep her figures intact, and of many preserves only one charac-

teristic, leaving the remainder all blurred and defaced. She paints the cast in a man's eye, or a limp in his gait, his favourite dress or his spectacles ; and the remainder is vague or non-existent. Her atelier is hung round with hundreds of unfinished drawings, although one or two are complete to the last detail ; could we learn of any man precisely how much of the humanity about him has been gathered and remembered, the knowledge would be worth many chapters of biography.

Of one's lifetime there are slices that might as well never have been lived. 'Idle time ran gadding by,' and the Hours, each with a smile or a sigh, tripped past and were gone irrecoverably ; they flitted over from the dark army of them before to the equally dark army behind, and left no sign to distinguish them from the host wherewith they mingled. But others almost yield us a taste of eternity ; for having come they abide with us for ever. Memory of the many April days I have known has taken one and preserved every detail of its sunny scene—big white-edged clouds you would almost think at anchor, the fleecy columns of smoke curling slowly up from red-tiled farmhouses, the barn fowls' distant peaceful crowing, bare land where the horses were at plough and came tramping, champing up to the half-sprouted hedge, along the roots of which tender young grass mingled with the withered stalks of last year, and the lark sang high above the ploughshare, while his fieldmates were calling and

building as they do only in Spring. So, too, of Autumn days she has taken one, and at will causes the faint sunlight to fall again on low fields with mist rising from them, and the glassy river wandering between hazy meadows, while an idle cawing, and lowing, and bleating speak the fatness and content of the ingathering. And no happy event of maturity lives with a vigour so pure and sweet as the early and trivial triumphs of childhood. The glad tension of nerve and brain when my first big fish made the reel sing as he dashed headlong across the stream repeats, and repeats, and repeats itself; so does the breezy May morning whereon I learned to shoot, and the troubled sleep of the succeeding night, when the gun still went off in dreamland, and young rooks with a tremble and a flutter of their black wings dropped through the green foliage on the grass.

From the earth, too, memory has chosen specks and spots for preservation. Into the oblivion where all the dead hours are, she has thrust towns and streets, railways and shops, but has engraven the grassy sloping hills, clear tidepools, and blue flashing seas, and trembling rivulets, and green nooks, and sedgy river-banks. From the gliding stream of hours she has stayed this and that, and married to each scene its appropriate moment, so that in the life I live over again, action, place, and time all fused in one form for me a conception and foretaste of eternity. What I have had a deep and true consciousness of

once, is it not mine for ever? Memory, that survives everything else, will it not survive the grave also? In this idle hour by the firelight I live, not as the beasts in moments that like grains of wheat in a mill-hopper are flung from the future into the present, and without stoppage borne into the past, but as the Gods, for Time stops when that which has gone by is still being lived.

But, nay, that is only a vain and arrogant fancy. Even as I write, the shadows have closed over the hill and the pine-trees; the neighbouring oaks are invisible; night, stormy, dark and starless, has fallen on the lone fields; the lights come in, and the wind that I did not hear before roars loud and dismal; and while in fancy I have been living in the past, lo! the stealthy moments have seized the chance of rushing from the emptying to the filling portion of my life, and because I have lived with the risen spirits of hours past, these that even now are passing are numbered with them that can have no resurrection, for of them I have no memory.

VILLAGE HEATHEN

IN these days it is not uncommon to hear parsons and statesmen bewailing the relapse of rural England into Paganism. But, lest you fancy I am going to

plunge into these acrimonious discussions, and dis-course of the Bible in schools, the waning influence of squire and parson, and the spread of free thought, let me say at once that the heathen I speak of are those of the preceding generation residing in our out-of-the-way northern villages. There was always a kind of outcast population who, for all the civilisation they knew or practised, might as well have been African savages or South Sea barbarians. England did not produce the like, except in the lowest purlieus and thieving kens of London. The only difference was that they were less given to vice, and more harmless. You could laugh at their eccentricities, and not feel you were encouraging iniquity. When a man and a woman felt an inclination for each other—I do not say fell in love, because the expression was too fine and grand for their simple vocabulary—they simply went together, without the offices either of registrar or priest. Till the time when one or both went to the workhouse—which, as far as I recollect, was the end of all my favourite heathens—they were tolerably faithful to one another. The man beat the woman just as if he had been her husband, and she slanged and scolded him for getting drunk and spending the money, exactly the same as if she had been his wife. When children came they were not christened, and I fancy the names, or rather ‘to-names,’ Bob’s Dick, and Sal’s Nance, or Jenny’s Mag, were not formally given, but simply ‘growed’ to

them ; but they were fed sometimes, they had a share of such food and clothes as were in the family, and learned to fight, and drink, and swear, sooner than any of their contemporaries.

Talking of clothes reminds me of old Isaac Hall, who certainly was as typical an example as could be found of the village heathen. Unlike the rest, however, he had never formed any feminine tie, but lived all by himself in a dilapidated hut beside the stable, his livelihood being made with a horse and cart, with which he led coals, and lime, and one thing and another. He confessed to being no hand at the needle, and when his coat, as would happen at times, grew so ragged that the wind threatened to blow the pieces asunder, he would offer a 'lift' to any ancient dame desirous of reaching the little market town, on condition that she would mend his garment by the way. How we children used to laugh as they went past. Isaac on the 'limmer,' driving the slow and aged black horse, the old woman, in spectacles, sitting on a bunch of straw, industriously stitching away at his coat. Everybody used to laugh at his unconsciously droll sayings. When he and a few boon companions, after much deliberation, ventured on a first ride in a railway train, 'Sit fair in the middle, lads, or then she's sure to cowp,' was his grave warning. Although he did not live more than twelve miles from the sea, he was at least fifty before he ever got a view of it. 'Like a muckle green field o'

turmits wi' bits o' white gowan here an' there,' was his description of it. Between the curate and him there used to be many curious passages. 'I wish you good evening,' the polite clergyman would say, and Isaac would reply, 'Drumly a bit,' or 'Wettish like'; for the village heathen will exchange a remark about the weather, but he knows nothing of courteous expressions of ceremony like 'Good-morning,' or 'Good-bye.' Farewells and greetings are not in his vocabulary. And still Isaac was very kindly. Once the parson determined to get him to church, and calling at the wretched little cottage, sat on a stool for two hours talking theology that was quite utterly beyond the carter's comprehension. 'I grieve sincerely for your soul,' at last said the priest in a voice that throbbed with emotion and despair. Old Isaac felt that something was wrong, though he could not exactly say what. Puzzled as to what could be amiss with the curate, he took his short black cutty from his mouth, rubbed the stem back and forward on his waistcoat sleeve, and handing it to his visitor, answered kindly, 'Have a draw of that, mister—it's grand for the stamach!' An act of civilisation that he did not learn till his dying day was the very simple ceremony of shaking hands. Village heathen meet and part without it—indeed, one comes and another goes away without farewell or greeting of any kind. On the rare occasions whereon Isaac saw two people pump-handling one another's arms, I have

seen his grey eyes shine with the most obviously keen curiosity and bewilderment, as if it were something he could not comprehend

On Sundays the average heathen goes neither to church nor meeting-house—firstly, because he has no clothes fit to be seen in ; and, secondly, because he has no inclination. Thirdly, as he most likely was very drunk on Saturday night, and not improbably is suffering from the effects of a fight, he is glad to take a longer sleep than usual. Then his horse's 'graith,' as he calls the harness, not improbably wants mending or seeing to, and the rest of the time flies all too swiftly. If it is a fine sunny day he can sit for hours on a grey stone, doing and saying nothing, his battered old hat tipped slightly over his eyes, the clay pipe never, except it needs refilling, taken from his mouth. Very likely the noise of the organ in church or the rise and fall of Presbyterians singing psalms is quite audible, but he does not listen, and I doubt if the golden hours that ceaselessly trip past bring to his vacant mind a thought or idea. Should it be wet the heathen gather together in the house, and if afterwards somebody's poultry gets stolen or the stable of an enemy is set on fire, village gossip is not slow to trace the plot to that meeting. For if there are thieves or incendiaries in the village, it is in that class they are to be found.

Many extraordinary stories are told of their death-beds, but they are not very trustworthy. The majority

die as they have lived. 'If I mun dee, I mun dee,' is their fatalistic creed, and, as a matter of fact, what with weariness, and old age, and sickness, and pain, there are very few who, when the time comes, have either fearful or rebellious thoughts about the change that looks so dreadful from a distance. To show the stubborn recklessness with which some of these men front the last great enemy, it may be worth while to tell a tale of which I can vouch for the truth of every detail. Harry Gibson was a horse coper in a little border village, and had been known all his life for a hard striker, a deep drinker, a warm friend, but an unforgiving, resolute enemy. His time came at last, however, and Harry lay down on the chaff bed from which he was never to rise again. Now the Presbyterian minister of the place was a good and pious man, who was deeply grieved with the ways of the little heathen colony in his midst, and though Harry never had darkened the door of the meeting-house, he determined to go up and offer him some consolation. He was received more frankly than he had expected, and Harry offered no objections to the visit. It was the preacher who furnished us with an account of the interview that followed. 'Well, Henry, I suppose you know you are dying?' began the minister, after some kindly preliminaries. 'Aye, I ken,' surlily quoth the sick man. 'And I hope you are prepared for the awful change?' went on his visitor. 'What's that?' queried Harry. 'Well, are you at peace with

all men?' 'Sartainly.' 'Have you forgiven your enemies?' 'Sartainly.' 'Then, Harry, you must do still more than that—you must pray for them.' Here the dying man, who was breathing heavily, grew uneasy and perplexed. 'What, pray for Jack Tod—him as lamed my dog?' he feebly inquired. 'Yes,' went on the good priest, 'you must pray even for John.' Harry was growing weaker every moment. It was some time before he replied, but when he did it was with unexpected energy. 'I pray, then,' he cried, 'that the——may go to hell.' And with that he turned his face to the wall, nor spoke again till he died.

Very different from this was the departure of old Isaac Hall. He was taken with heart disease, that gradually reduced his strength, and as he grew weaker and weaker it happened that I was nearly the only person he would see. Going back and forward to the old place, I had got into the habit of carrying snuff or tobacco to him, and sitting on his old broken three-legged table and listening to his yarns about old things and old ways. It was a difficult matter to get him to see the doctor, who, as it chanced, was a companion of mine, and on no account whatever would he take to bed. As to parsons, he never had admitted one to his presence, except the afore-mentioned curate, and he having left the district the old pagan would suffer no other to make his acquaintance. On the last morning of his life I went down to the cottage

about 10 o'clock. Isaac had managed to get up and crawl to his chair by the fireside. An empty basin showed that he had consumed the food made for him by a kindly neighbour. The doctor came in just behind me. 'This is about the last on't,' remarked his patient with a wan and feeble smile. After one or two questions, the physician informed him as gently as he could that probably before the sun that now was shining in at the window could wear round to the gable he would have passed into the long sleep. 'Um,' said the old man, but he did not abate a jot of his usual cheerfulness. 'I'd like a draw first,' he said, and produced the black cutty from his pocket and asked me to fill it. The doctor gave a signal that meant 'Humour him; it doesn't make a bit of difference,' and I took out my own pouch, thinking something lighter than his own would be the best. But he rejected it firmly. Irish roll he had smoked all his life and Irish roll he would end with, and he fumbled in his pocket till out came the tin box, by pressing the lid of which he was used to cut off exactly a pipeful. When he had done that he handed the box to me. 'You'll keep that,' he said, 'to mind you of ould Isaac.' The doctor lit the pipe and handed it to him, and as he tried to get one or two puffs with his rapidly failing breath, asked if he wouldn't like to live his time over again. 'No,' answered Isaac. 'You see the cartin' trade's about done since them railways started, and Black Jock' (that was the name of his

horse) 'is as hard up as I am. I s'pose he'll be for the knackers now.' 'Would you not like to be strong and young again, like you were when you fought "The Pilgrim" at the Blue Bell?' 'Aye, aye,' returned he, while a pleasant gleam came in his face. 'I gave you a fine job to cure him. That wasn't the only time when I made broken bones for you to set. But it was a cursed hard winter,' he went on, 'and many's the hungry belly I had. No, no, I don't want my time back again.' Then he quietly laid his pipe on its old stone by the fire, and muttering, 'The cartin' trade's fair done. I think I'll have a bit sleep,' dropped off into a doze from which he never awoke. It was thus the pagans of village, and farm, and homestead lived, thus they died; but even those who derived amusement from the ways of them will hardly regret that the spread of education and other civilising influences are gradually removing them from the country. Pagans of a new kind will doubtless succeed them, but they cannot be quite as heathenish as the old.

WINTER SCENERY

ONE most majestic expression of English landscape is visible only in the depths of a winter fog. When snowy fields, and grey hillside, and black river are shrouded in darkness: when from your midday

window you may not discern the garden laurels, far less the white fringes worked round the green leaves of them by the frozen mist—then is there a journey I better love to make than to sit reading and shuddering by the light of a morning lamp. It is to the brow of a rocky escarpment, on clear days overlooking a fertile and well-peopled champaign. At starting you have to feel your way among the trees of the long plantation, much as Thoreau used to guide his steps o' nights by touching the Walden firs ; but as the path rises, the heavy thickness thins away, and the brown boughs overlaid with frostwork and populous with forlorn and fluttering birds come plainer and plainer into view till, at last, on the edge of the Roman Camp at the top, you stand in brilliant sunshine under a sky of clearest blue. Even in summer it is a place of fancies ; for (geologists will tell you) these frowning cliffs once overlooked a mighty sea ; sea-gull and cormorant fished where is now a sleepy pinewood ; seaweed and tangle swayed to the tide where the corn now nods in August and in spring the wild-flowers bloom. And look you to-day how Nature is mocking the present with a fanciful image of the past ! Village, and town, and hamlet are as if submerged in some weird, phantasmal ocean. What in summer were purple mountains are low grey shores. Under a gentle haze the level and desolate waste, where no ship sails, is heaving in billows, and on the coast of many a little bay and inlet the dark waves break into

spray. You listen for the roar of the breakers and the sea-mew's cry ; but this ghost of a dead sea gives you no answer back. Silently the wind blows on its dark bosom, and it is rocked into storm without a sound. On cliff and promontory the waves are broken noiseless. It is hard to realise that under their commotion engines are puffing, horses are pacing and hauling, and there sweats a force of moiling and toiling men.

It would almost seem as if in winter Nature lulled her children to sleep, that for a season she may let her fancy roam its fill. Easily as a housewife reorders her furniture she thrusts up an island through the sea, she sends the waters rushing over a continent, she adds you a city to the ocean floor, she makes a lake give up her acres to the plough. Yet there are times (and especially I think in winter) when, like a crone that crouches, mumbling old memories, at the fire, she recalls her prowess in the past. Perhaps it were better for some if they had never revolted from her mesmerism. Man is not wholly absolved from it. Cold that stills the bird and casts the reptile into trance—cold that slays plant and insect, and banishes butterfly and swallow—is the nepenthe of life. It does not make you loiter in the greenwood, or by the river, as in the languid hours of summer ; but it predisposes to reverie in tune with the dead or the dreaming world. In summer, you love the fields for the promise of harvest, and your heart fills with natural happiness ;

but you love them in winter wholly for the beauty of the passing pageant, and in the face of the fierce and bitter cruelty abroad. There is not a bird nor a beast that goes untortured. Mark how the lonely migrant hurries through the keen air with a complaint like the noise of bending ice under the curling-stone! With what a languid play of his heavy, wide-feathered wings does the rook come home at dusk to his cold perch! Gallant looks the fox as, just when stars are paling before the faint daylight, he leaps the farm-yard wall; but not because he is at truce with the kennelled hounds is he so bold: like every other living thing he is gripped by hunger. '*Voici venir l'hiver tueur de pauvres gens.*' True in a measure of human life, that verse is absolutely true of life without the pale.

As if to intensify the horrors of the frost, the artist ceases not from plying brush and chisel. The snow-flakes that hide the last particles of food from the birds and drive the poor hares from open to covert, float gracefully down the '*aer bruno*,' till earth lies enfolded in a wrap of peerless down. The hillside, last May a marvel of green and gold, now wears a grey beyond limning; and not even when the first leaves drooped from the birch, and the chestnut-flowers told their loves to the breeze, did the forest show fairer than now, with his wilderness of brown stems and white bewildering boughs. He is peopled with rovers driven in from the dead, white fields, yet is he a

wretched home for them. Puny tits, feathery bunches no bigger than a pigeon's egg, hang on to the lower side of the snowy twigs, and peck for dear life some living atom from the bark ; a few small seeds are left, and flights of greenfinch chaffer and fight for them ; and where jay or blackbird has scratched up a heap of dead leaves the robin and his fellow-choristers quest diligently for a dinner. And as the hard weather grows harder, even the flitting wren is grudging her tiny rations, as you gather from her pained and anxious song.

And still the cruel freak ends not. In the hard frost scarce a whisper passed to the willow from the stiff, dry riverside grasses ; but a wind gathers in the north, and roars through the tossing oaks and quivering beeches till they moan again, swinging the myriads of black sleepers in their shelter. But he is never so frightfully frolic as in the free open, where he wreathes the snow into drifts and garlands, and builds him castles and towers as if to mock the doings of 'earth going upon the earth.' And in this deadly extravaganza not the slightest heed has he nor any of his playmates for the sacredness of life. The mountain sheep are buried, the hungry stag and his wild companions are driven down to the poacher : where he falls the wretched human wanderer is hushed in death. It is done with no set purpose, no deliberate ferocity. The storm passes, the grey clouds are rent, and presently quiet stars shine brilliant on the furrowed snow

and the twinkling icicles. The sea's fury is soothed and stilled, his clamour subsides, his breakers turn wavelets, and his dead are laid gently on his frozen beach. There they rest peacefully enough : peacefully as the birds you find frozen to the twig whereon they perched. In thawing-time the little corpses tumble off ; and the tale of tiny things gone out of life that is told by the melting snow on moor and meadow is more or less hideously complete.

Yet who curses Nature for cruel ? Ourselves are part of her ; and be her mood what it may, ourselves are more closely in sympathy with her, our mother, than with any of her victims. In truth, the East has no deeper fatalism than burns in us Westerns. As no man rebels against death, so neither is there any revolt against the accomplishment of the Hand of God. The sublime tempest strews the coast with wrecks : the beautiful lightning is Death's messenger ; Winter, with his dreams and his sleep, his voice of lamentation and his mortal visitations of frost and storm, is a weird and gruesome bedfellow. And as you watch the shy woodlanders adventuring to the very doorstep, and the wretched hare so beside himself with want that he will rush upon death for a mouthful from your garden, a sense of pity and wrath will oft-times menace that spirit of acquiescence and devoutness in which is the best and sanest habit of living life can ever achieve. For without death there can be no living, for Death and Life are—not mortal enemies.

as poets have feigned, but—sister influences. Perhaps, indeed, they are one, and only their names are different.

NORTHUMBRIAN GUIARDS

THE rustics of East Anglia, Dr. Jessopp tells us, are forgetting how to laugh, and whoever has gone much in country ways knows that the wisest denizen of the fields is becoming the saddest. Lapse of time affects no other animal in the same way. The lark sings as merrily, the young lambs play as sportively to-day as they did when fields were tended by thralls of the early Saxons, but the generations of man are not all equally joyful ; for some live in peace, and others under the shadow of war, one basks in contentment and the next is made unhappy by new ambitions.

It is by no means asserted that in the good old times life was one long scene of merriment ; that the rude forefathers of the hamlet were always jocund as they drove their teams afield, or the milkmaid blythe as she carried home her brimming pail, or that health and plenty continually cheered the labouring swain. But undoubtedly there was greater fun among them than there is now, and for an obvious reason. The rustic of our time looks townward for his amusements. Cheap trips have carried him to the beach, the pier, and the promenade ; to the low drinking-bar and the

cheap music-hall ; he is familiar with topical songs and street catchwords ; his ideals are Cockney. Previously he had to depend on himself and his neighbour for pastime, and instead of saving for an annual excursion, he invented pastimes for home ; and as these usually left him with a clear head and easy conscience, they shed over his life a mild radiance such as does not dwell with the memory of a town spree, and its subsequent headaches and muddlement. But the young rustic dressed in ready-made shoddy, and feeling himself quite as ' modern ' and *fin de siècle* as the sickliest decadent who flourishes the poor phrase, looks with as superior a contempt upon ancient customs as he does upon the outfit of hodden grey, cut and sewn for his grandfather by the village tailor. Thus nearly all the pleasant usages that edged the dull circle of labour with brightness are becoming obsolete. Youths are married, and no one ropes them ; children are born and no labouring cake prepared ; christenings and funerals occasion less and less feasting. No one now goes a-mothering, or keeps cider mass, or blesses the spring appletrees. A steadily decreasing number keep the feast days of Lent, and eat their pancakes and fry their carlins, pluck the catkins duly from the willow to wave on Palm Sunday, and beg their pace eggs on Easter Day. Where they do the ancient observances are forgotten. Lincolnshire ploughmen still on Twelfth Day carry round the bedizened coulter as the Pagans did, but without the

appropriate dancing and mummers; the Scottish hind lets his children seek their hogmanaye, but he has forgotten the petitionary songs of the daft days as completely as his English brethren their old dance round the maypole, and their skill with the quintain. It is not only so, but the farm labourer of to-day, instead of taking pleasure simply as his ancestors did, makes a droll and monkey-like imitation of fashionable diversions. His grandmothers, when they were young, met on winter nights for a quilting party, or other purpose of helping the poor or newly married, and made their needles fly like lightning in order to get soon done, that when their lads came to take them home they might still have a spare hour or two during which they would merrily dance in the candle-lighted barn to the fiddling of the village musician. Instead of this our swains, three or four times *per annum*, produce a subscription ball that if they were wits would be accepted as the caricature of a fashionable assembly.

Among the children alone is there to be found any considerable trace of the merry-makings where-with the long dark hours of winter used to be sped in the country. In one or two out-of-the-way places you still may find a mangled version of the Christmas mummer's play that once was prevalent over all the country. As soon as November comes they begin to hollow out the turnip lanterns they take to light them in the dark nights through the long dark woods, over

clayey bottoms and along sheep-tracks that wind amid whin and thorn-bushes, which they would in nowise face save in company and with a candle, for steam-engine and schoolmaster have not yet quite banished the bogle from the mire, the wraith from the stream, the ghost from wood and ruin ; yet one would think they are more likely to inspire fear than to feel it, so hobgoblin-like are they in their strange habiliments. The lanterns form the least important part of the outfit ; wooden swords must be made, pasteboard helmets manufactured, fierce moustachios twined from horsehair, old shirts begged as surplices, and distinctive ornaments invented for each character ; and there is on a minor scale as much quarrelling over the parts as there is over the cast for a new piece in a fashionable theatre.

The words form a strange conglomeration, for in ages of decay all the elements of yule-tide laughter have been blent into one confused story, but perhaps the record of a single representation without comment on the bald, fragmentary and corrupted text will best show how minstrelsy and mummary, the miracle-play and the carol engrafted on a Pagan custom have each lent something to the guisarding. Fancy, then, the big kitchen of a homely Northumbrian farmhouse a few days before Christmas, a bunch of mistletoe already above the door ; sprays of holly with red berries on the wall ; in the great arm-chair a jolly farmer past middle-life and grown a trifle too corpu-

lent, yet with big voice as cheery, grey eyes as keen as ever ; a delight yet a terror to the rosy-faced maids. Our host is a lover of old times, old faces and old customs, and at hirings it is a common remark that there is never a vacant place here unless someone dies. But though the guisards are sure of a hearty welcome, it is only after much pushing and urging that the chubby boy, who is the Bessie, shyly ventures into the middle of the hall, reciting :—

Redd sticks, redd stools,
Here comes in a pack of fools ;
A pack o' fools behind the door,
Step in, St. George, and clear the way.

The familiar lines are scarcely heard amid the farmer's loud laughter and the giggling of the girls : Bessie is so strange and fantastic a figure ; for the child, unconsciously following a custom as old as the Roman Saturnalia, has made a rude attempt to disguise his sex, and with the great 'ugly' of a field-worker on his head, and a home-made broom in his hand, wears a cast-off petticoat belonging to his sister, while the Marchioness herself never had so smudged a face. I am sure his predecessors at the Feast of Fools, the Lord of Misrule and the Abbot of Unreason, bore themselves more confidently. Yet he is all we have left of a character that has probably been represented in England since the days when Druids feasted at the fruit time of their sacred berry, and 'Bessie' reproduces what seems to have been among early

rates regarded as the crowning humour of disguising sex, a humour still in favour by-the-by with the Lincolnshire devotees of Ceres.

With the entry of the next character Paganism disappears. Over this one's clothes is cast a white shirt, which probably is a heritage from the time when the miracle-play with all its seeming foolery and irreverence was played in church by mummers who put on sham priestly vestments. St. George has also a wall-paper helmet on his head, and a thick cudgel which we are to fancy a spear in his hand, and on his face are false whiskers, the effect of which is enhanced by a lavish use of burnt cork. In a treble that would fain be a thundering bass, he boldly advances, exclaiming :—

Here comes in St. George,
Who never came before :
He will do the best he can,
And the best can do no more.

The thing being English, there must, of course, be a fight, and old folks remember when all the seven champions of Christendom came in and showed some pretty play at single-stick, but time has hopelessly muddled the business, and in some districts the patron Saint is a Crusader and kills a Turkish knight, while the foe appointed for him to-night is, with a fine disregard of the unities, Goliath the giant, as if this were a miracle-play and George were David. The Philistine is the biggest boy and the most fiercely whiskered.

Reckless of dates and the invention of gunpowder, he boldly proclaims :—

Here comes in Goliath,
Goliath is my name,
A sword and pistol by my side,
I hope to win the game.

To be literal, he has a rusty side-arm which has lost its flint and of which the hammer is broken, while he clanks by his side a wooden sabre, across the top of which for a hilt he has, with a tenpenny nail, fastened a piece of wood. It would seem that Time has worn away all the unessential portions of the sharp colloquy that follows, for it is a model of brevity and point :—

ST. GEORGE : The game, Sir, the game, Sir !
It's not within your power :
I'll hack you into inches
In less than half an hour.

GOLIATH (*scornfully*) : You, Sir ?

ST. GEORGE (*confidently*) : Yes, I, Sir.

GOLIATH : Pull out your sword and try, Sir.

Then they fall to with a rattle of sticks, but the fight is a mere pretence, for since the fathers have been prohibited from cracking pates at fair or market for half a crown or a new hat, there has been none to teach youngsters the principles of fence. So the Philistine drops without being smitten. Likely enough one or other would appear to have had better reasons for falling in the olden time, as the victorious champion, in apparent forgetfulness of his assumed character, wails forth :—

Alas ! Alas ! What have I done,
I've gone and killed the farmer's son.
Round the kitchen, round the hall,
Is there a doctor to be found at all ?

Now enters the comic man of the company, the traditional quack of the middle ages, the typical charlatan, such as Le Sage and Molière drew, the sort of person who, in the time of Edward II. wrapped the Prince of Wales in red cloths to cure him of small-pox, and who prescribed powdered beetles and crickets as a remedy for the stone. A wisp of straw has been thrust between his jacket and his back to represent a hump, his well-combed beard fastened with twine, once adorned a white horse's tail, he carries his father's long crook and advances with a hirkle, glancing to right and left like a magpie searching for carrion. Thus he speaks :—

DR. BROWN : Here comes in old Doctor Brown
The best old doctor in the town.

ST. GEORGE : How do you know you are the best old doctor in
the town ?

DR. BROWN : By my travels, Sir.

ST. GEORGE : How far have you travelled ?

DR. BROWN : From Russia to Prussia, from France into Spain,
And back to old England again.

ST. GEORGE : What can you cure ?

I will not set down his list of diseases. It was probably framed in days when plain speech was common alike in hall and cottage, but to-day it makes the very servant girls hide their faces, seeing which, St. George, with more chivalry than he is aware, hastily interrupts with the question :—

Can you cure a dead man ?
DR. BROWN : Yes, I have a little boxy,
They call it hoxxy-poxy,
Put a little to his nose,
And a little to his chin,
Rise up, Jack, and let us hear you sing.

Whereupon the dead man, who has lain somewhat uncomfortably on the sandy floor, eagerly watching the signal for his resurrection, springs hastily to his feet, dusts his white shirt, and breaks forth into melody as thus :—

Once I was dead, but now I am alive,
Blessed be the happy man that made me to revive.

There should now follow tricks and jugglery and tumbling, with quips and quiddities and clowning, of which our boys know nothing, but all ranging themselves round the kitchen begin a kind of choral dialogue that seems but a scrap and fragment of what it should be. It runs thus :—

ST. GEORGE : Who lives in that red-tiled house over yonder ?
CHORUS : You go and ask, and you'll soon find the owner.
ENSEMBLE : The ducks and the geese
How they do swim over !
ST. GEORGE : How deep is that pond over yonder ?
CHORUS : Fling in a stone and you'll soon find the bottom.
ENSEMBLE : The ducks and the geese, &c.

It is unadulterated nonsense, yet we are all in the spirit of it, and the farmer's voice is loudest in the final 'do swim over.' Now follow songs, but as they are common and modern, 'Robin Tamson's smiddie,' 'There's queer folk in the shaws,' &c., it is needless to

write them down. 'The last one' is evidently an old favourite, however :—

Blinkin' Jock the cobbler,
He had a blinkin' eye,
He sold his wife for forty pounds,
And what the worse was I?

And now the entertainment is nearly over, but, like a missionary meeting, it ends with a collection. The smallest boy in the company now steps out with a tin box in his hand, and standing in the middle, while many coppers and one or two pieces of silver are dropped into it, says :—

Ladies and gentlemen, all at your ease,
Give to the Guisards just what you please.
Here comes I, little Johnny Jack,
Wife and family at my back ;
My family's large though I am small,
And so a little helps us all.
Roast beef, plum pudding, strong beer and mince pie,
Who loves these better than Father Christmas and I ?
A mug of Christmas ale will make us merry and sing,
Some money in our pockets will be a very fine thing.
So, ladies and gentlemen, all at your ease,
Give the Christmas Guisards just what you please.

While this is going on the turnip lanterns are being relit, the Champion, the doctor and Goliath seize their sticks and all prepare for a tramp across the fields in the frosty starlight to the next farmhouse, but the cook sees that they do not walk on empty stomachs.

In a few more years the play that is already so corrupted that the text used in Cornwall or the Mid-

lands hardly shows an affinity to this, will be altogether forgotten. Yet I for one do not believe that any amusement to which the poor of towns have access is productive of more pleasure than this and other simple country pastimes. Nevertheless, a time is likely to come when their loss will be regretted. Even now the towns cannot support all those who crowd into them, and when the rustic rediscovers his home he will miss the amusements that have grown obsolete.

POACHERS

AMONG the amusing characters gradually disappearing out of village life, one who is greatly missed is the merry, old-fashioned moucher. It is not that fewer cases come before the magistrates, or that game is safer, but the business is done in a different style, mostly by roughs from town, whose object is pure gain. But the pleasant, impudent veteran who poached, in part out of principle, as holding that there could be no property in wild life, and in part from relish of a good dinner, but still more from a passionate love of sport and the enjoyment derived from pottering about in the open air among the woods and by the river, has passed away. His doings were laughed at nearly as much in the hall as in the public-house. I remember once being present while a well-known poacher was being cross-examined as a witness in a bad case of incen-

diarism, about which he had been first to give the alarm. 'But what were you doing in the wood?' asked the lawyer. 'I was following my vocation,' he replied so simply that the very judge smiled. The late Captain Craven, of Brockhampton Park, used to tell a story illustrating in the same way a frankness that might easily be mistaken for 'cheek.' A notorious poacher, who had been the plague of the estate for a long time, disappeared, and was not seen for months, till one day he accosted Captain Craven in Cheltenham, but he scarcely was recognisable, gaol and hospital and disease had so changed and oldened him before his time. The odd plea which he advanced for requiring help was that he could not 'carry on the old trade, being too bad with the rheumatics *to lie out now.*' 'I told him he was a damned scoundrel, and gave him half a crown,' was invariably the close of the narrative.

But by far the most amusing poacher I ever knew lived in a little Northumbrian village, where his doings still are talked of as if they had occurred only yesterday. Once he fell very ill, and, greatly to his surprise, for he never went to church, discovered a great friend in the parson, soup, wine, chicken, and all sorts of delicacies being sent him. In process of time he recovered, and very soon appeared at the door of the clergyman's house, asking to see him. Being shown into the library, he began to fumble in the huge bag-like pocket of his coat, and eventually flinging down two brace of partridges and a pheasant, he exclaimed,

'e was verra gud to me when I was bad, and as long as there's a hare or a burrd on the estate 'e shanna want for them !' But he was made almost too much of at the hall, where one of the young ladies was his devoted friend. She was extremely fond of a joke, and would worm out of Andrew where on a certain night he was going to poach, then she would tell the keeper, and then make the muddle still greater by explaining to Andrew what she had done, and advising him to take a new direction. For his part, he seemed to have a kind of proprietarial pride in the fields. On going his rounds he would mend a broken fence or gate, or clear off the weeds that threatened to choke a young tree. So fardid this go that he resented the intrusion of other poachers as vigorously as if he were the owner. The poor harmless fellow died at a green old age, and it is to the credit of those among whom he lived that never once was he inside a gaol. Not that he considered that a piece of good luck ; for it came about in this way. The keeper was well aware from his experience that his master never would prosecute Andrew, so whenever he got hold of him among the covers or preserves his plan was simply to take off his coat and give the poacher a sound thrashing. As long as the latter retained his vigour he thought this an easy way of getting off, especially if, as sometimes happened, he had not very much the worst of the encounter ; but he grew feeble as he advanced in years, and the other, who was younger, had so decidedly

the advantage, there was no pleasure in it. When Andrew was getting bent and grey he used to tell me he would far rather go to prison than undergo the periodical beating to which he was occasionally subject, despite all the craft he was master of. However, he had become used to the treatment, and made no public complaint. It was a tacit bargain that he should purchase his sporting rights with sore bones. Once or twice, indeed, he expostulated with 'Velve-teens,' who was really a reasonable and good-natured fellow, but without effect. 'Man,' he would say to him, 'it's poor work for you to hit an a'd failed man like me. It's no as if I was young and yebble.' It wasn't a bit of use. 'You should bide oot 'o the grund, then, if you dinna like your wages,' would be the inexorable reply, as the keeper cut and stripped the hazel rod or ash sapling with which in later times the castigation was inflicted.

Poaching, however, is usually transacted by characters of a much more desperate caste. Yet sometimes the very worst of them will display a sense of rough humour. Not many years ago, for example, a gang of men were one night netting the Tweed, when a water-bailiff, unluckily for himself, happened to come on them. Being anxious to go on with their sport they did not very well know what to do. It would have been easy to duck him in a pool or terrify him off the ground, but that would only have been the means of his getting assistance. A very singular plan

was finally suggested. Close to them was an immense rabbit-hole, probably enlarged by a fox. Into this they thrust his head as far as ever it would go, till, in fact, only his legs protruded. Between these they ran in a sheep stake, so that it was impossible for him to get out or to make any noise to attract attention. There he had to lie and shiver with cold, while his tormentors calmly went on with their job, laughing at the trick as they did so. He was found next morning by a shepherd, who, when he saw what he took to be a dead man's feet sticking out of the earth, was so unnerved as hardly to be able to relieve him.

One of the most notable river poachers I ever knew was Mark Smith. What a splendid athlete he was may be judged from one of his most famous feats. At half-past eight o'clock, on a night in early winter, he was caught in the act by two keepers, who, to their own satisfaction, identified their man. Nevertheless, at the sessions, to which he was duly summoned, he established an alibi by proving that before 10 o'clock he was drinking and quarrelling in the public-house of a village fifteen miles off—was, in fact, so drunk that the landlord refused to serve him. He had, aided by a short cut or two, run the distance. Water-bailiffs generally came to grief if they meddled with him. The story of those who captured him was that he had been on the opposite side of a river across which it was necessary to carry him in a boat. At the deepest portion of the stream, however, getting

his feet against one side of the vessel and his back against the other, he exerted his strength to such effect that the timbers gave way, and the entire crew found themselves struggling in the water, a situation wherein they were more anxious about their own lives than the safety of the prisoner. On land Mark was quite as successful as on the water. By nicely calculating his raids, he over and over again spoiled what everybody thought would be an excellent day's sport ; the pheasants and partridges that were to have tested the ability of the gunners often being in the hands of the cadger, who received Mark's spoil while beaters were vainly trying to put them up from the cover or the turnips.

He and the friend or two who aided him were full of ingenuity. Sometimes just about the pairing season he would take a little red bantam cock, armed with a long sharp spur, to the side of a plantation. It knew its business well, and would at once crow a defiance to everything within hearing. But the cock pheasant, which is a very pugilistic bird, would not endure this for a moment. He straightway sallies out and offers battle to the stranger, with the consequence that in two rounds he is knocked out of time or killed outright by the trained fighter, whose master, in less time than it takes to say, drops the corpse into his big pocket, and encourages his champion to a new encounter. Mark used always to carry a pocketful of grain or other bird food about with him when he went

abroad, teaching partridges and pheasants to feed in particular spots, where, choosing a windy day on which sound would not travel far, he killed them in open daylight. Nevertheless, in spite of his knowingness, he could not escape the usual fate. He took to drinking badly, and had no money to pay his fines, and so had to go to prison frequently, and after every spell came out more of a desperado and less his own athletic self. Then he began to nourish feelings of revenge against the keeper who had oftenest been instrumental in his capture. Finally they met and had a fatal quarrel. The last I heard of Mark was that he was doing a long term for manslaughter.

Of all the poachers who once lived in the district where these examples mostly are taken from, and who used to fight and play quoits and get drunk in the yard of the Black Bull, one only is left. He goes by the nickname of Sodger Whiff, because he was once in the army, and in his cups he tells the story of an engagement he was in, when, as he invariably tells his auditors, 'The gun went off whiff!' The rustics all laugh when he comes to that bit, because they expect it. What he is most expert at is making an excuse when he is caught. Does the owner of preserved water come upon him using salmon roe, of the preparation of which he still holds the secret, he so plausibly recounts the story of some great pike which he is anxious to kill for the good of the fishing that as likely as not he gets a present of tackle, or some drink money

instead of the punishment that would be meted out to another. Once he laughed a certain nobleman, who is also a renowned sailor, out of the judicial temper in the same way. 'Sodger' had been caught at the corner of a preserve netting pheasants. 'Man Whiff,' said the gamekeeper who took him, 'I'm sorry to meet you here.' 'Dod, but I'm sorrier to meet you,' returned the other. 'I doot you'll have to gaun up to the castle,' went on the keeper. 'Houts, no,' replied the poacher, 'that's far owre fine a place for me.' To the castle he had to go, however, and 'Whiff' was shown into the library—that chamber of horror for culprits. At that time the nobleman I have referred to was staying with his aunt, who was the owner of the estate. When he came down Sodger was standing rapt in an ecstasy before one of the pictures. 'Now, what have you been doing?' asked his interlocutor sternly. The prisoner made no direct reply, but with a hardly noticeable glance out of the corner of his cunning grey eye, struck an attitude of admiration, and exclaimed, 'Lord, isn't that grand!' At a repetition of the question he merely changed his position, and before the portrait of an eighteenth-century dame cried out, 'Dod, hinny, but that's a rare picter. Now I warrant they would pay a five-pun note for that one.' 'Will you answer my question?' said the impatient nobleman, but, 'By George, here's a grander one still,' cried the poacher, and went off into another rhapsody. So he continued till, perhaps, thinking the game might

be carried too far, he turned with a face of demure simplicity, and said, 'Poaching, did you say? Odd, I had forgotten about it looking at them bonny picters. Well, I'm here to answer you. But could that leddy in the bonny dress,' pointing to the handsomest face on the walls, 'be your mother, sir? Dod, she's awful like you.' It was of no use. The catechism was given up in despair. With a solemn warning and a horn of beer Sodger Whiff was sent back scatheless.

A WINTER'S TALE

IN the straggling, forlorn, unbeautiful Northumbrian village of Blackford there was, half a century ago, only one comfortable-looking building. It was none of the dwellings of the coal and lime carters, the hedgers and ditchers, or the drainers, who formed the bulk of the population; for the low, drooping roofs of their cottages, mended here and there with tarpaulin, spoke too eloquently of damp, draught, and over-pressure; it was not the red-tiled croft-house inhabited by Willie Allan, the clever, lazy, kindly, cock-fighting, dog-fancying, boxing, wrestling, swimming, bee-keeping tenant of the little farm, for bachelordom and neglect had combined with Willie's devotion and hobbies of one kind and another to create of it and its surroundings an embodiment of picturesque disorder; it was not the great austere-looking square-built

Presbyterian meeting-house with its prison-like walls and narrow windows ; far less was it the slated, shabby-genteel manse, for in cold weather the effect of the whitewash upon it was to threaten the spectator with a fit of the ague. No ; on any gusty day in November, when the very trees on the hill-tops seemed to have turned their shivering backs to the breeze that whistled through their branches and plucked off their red-tinted leaves, while inferior houses looked almost as though crouching to escape the blast or to be facing it in haggard despair, the Red Lion Inn alone, with its comfortable overcoat of impervious thatch, stood quiet and composed, and towards evening the ruddy glare of its kitchen fire pressingly invited the toil-worn cottars to forsake their scolding wives and brawling children, their scanty fires and draughty houses, and enjoy its comfortable warmth. And often at the same time there would be a light at one of the two attic windows that peered out from the roof like a pair of open grey eyes from under lids of thatch. For one of these attic rooms was the favourite resort of Adam Black, the thriving publican of Blackford. Hither at night would he often resort, if business was dull down below, to smoke his pipe, to think over his plans, and to calculate his ingoings and outgoings ; for, as he would sometimes remark, ‘ It took a deal of worry for a man as could neither read nor write to keep a true reckoning,’ and Adam’s natural abilities had not been brightened up by education.

That did not hinder him from being greatly liked and respected in Blackford. The worst that could be said about him was, that he was rather hard, and, as a matter of fact, there was little softness in his nature, though he never failed to greet his customers with a smile and jest ; and if the smile was a little mechanical and the jest the worse for wear, it mattered little to quiet country folk who were not ashamed to laugh at the twentieth repetition of a witticism. And it was everywhere agreed that he kept a model public-house, never, for instance, allowing any fighting to go on in a conspicuous place, but forcing the combatants to have it out, if they really meant business, in a secluded back-yard where they could black each other's eyes with the most perfect safety and comfort. Any man might go to the Red Lion with the assurance that he would not be made a fool of. Adam knew the drinking capacity of every full-grown male in the neighbourhood of Blackford, and would let none transgress his limit, or, if an accident did happen, managed everything in the quietest possible way. And besides, the villagers all knew him to be, in their own language, as game as a bantam. At times Adam might, in bargain-making, show himself not over-scrupulously above-board, and, generally speaking, what he could get he took, but he steered clear of paltry meannesses, and he was known to be stubbornly faithful to all his friends ; a man, on the whole, with a conscience not too troublesome, but far from dead.

In domestic life Adam was a martinet. He ruled his son Aleck, his red-haired servant Bet, and even his niece Kitty, with a rod of iron. Prompt, quick cheerful obedience was the law of the household. Only Kitty, besides being the smartest, prettiest, and cleverest girl in Blackford, was so wayward and spirited that not even her uncle, who liked her better than he liked anybody else in the world, was able to keep her entirely under control.

It was a great grief to Adam when he found out that Kitty was in a mood to throw herself away upon Willie Allan. Not that he disliked Willie, nobody could do that, but he thought him unlikely to be a good husband, *i.e.*, a thriving one, able to keep his family comfortable ; for he never gave his mind to his business, but wasted his time over what Adam sometimes called his menagerie, for the croft-house was almost a Noah's Ark in its way. The chance visitor was certain to find at every season of the year a litter of pups before the kitchen fire, and an old owl and still more ancient magpie carried on an unceasing struggle for the favourite perch above the kitchen clock. What had once been the best bedroom was converted into a flight for canaries, and there were always hanging about cages containing finches, linnets, thrushes, blackbirds, and even sparrows, for Willie was a noted experimentalist in the art of crossing, and could show an assortment of the most strangely marked hybrids. The garden was stocked with bees and the barn with

Russian rabbits, twenty different kinds of fancy poultry were allowed to spoil the crops, and the dovecot was inhabited by as many varieties of pigeons. In the pigsty he had a tame badger, and there was a litter of foxes in one outhouse and an otter in another. Whatever had life had a deep interest for Willie, as it had had a deep interest for his father before him; for, as well may be imagined, these tastes were inherited. But he gratified them at the expense of agriculture. Everybody said the croft would pay splendidly to a man who knew how to work it, but the Allans were not likely to make a fortune there or anywhere else.

It was, therefore, not without reason that Adam was set against his niece taking up with Willie; he considered it would be throwing herself away. And he thought himself possessed of a powerful instrument for enforcing his own view, for he had full command of Kitty's little fortune—something like a hundred pounds—left her by her father, Adam's elder brother, who had preceded him in the occupation of the Red Lion. Whatever it amounted to, it was all in the big box that stood in Adam's favourite attic room, for he had a deep-rooted suspicion of banks, and, like many other country folk of that time, held that his savings could not be safer than under his own lock and key.

'If you marry Allan,' he said to Kitty, and she knew that no nice scruples about right and wrong

would hinder him from keeping his word, 'not a penny will you get from me.'

The truth was that he had quite another scheme in his head. Why should Kitty look beyond his son Aleck? True, they were cousins, but the prejudice against cousins marrying was not strong in the neighbourhood, and then what advantages there were! Kate was a splendid manager, and Aleck, though he had not his father's spirit and cleverness, was a hard worker and very careful, too careful, some people said, for, whereas his father was only keen and saving, he was as mean and hard as a miser. But in match-making these are not defects to make a party ineligible, and, best of all, thought Adam, 'there'll be no need to divide the money.' And accordingly he spared no effort to enforce his will, so that poor Kitty had a hard time of it, what with her uncle's threats and the no more agreeable persuasions of her money-grubbing suitor. Yet she was far too spirited to yield, and in her inmost mind was resolved to have both the sweetheart and the money, for who needed it if not careless, squandering Willie?

It was no fault in her eyes that her lover cared nothing whatever for her fortune, though she would scold and rate him well for his indifference. One winter night as she was returning from a neighbouring village about three miles off, to which she had been sent by her uncle, Willie quite accidentally met her, and they had a happy walk homeward along a lane

on the snow covering of which the moonlight fell fair and softly, making the hard wheel-tracks glitter and silvering the half-black, half-whitened hedgerows. Willie never before had seemed so true and earnest and loyal as Kitty poured into his ear the story of her persecution.

‘Never mind, lass,’ he said, ‘let him keep the money. I’ve little, but I’m not in debt, and if you’ll but promise to come to the Croft, I’ll—yes Kitty—I’ll sell every live thing I have and work day and night for you.’

‘No, no, Will, there’s no need for that; but do you think I’ll give up my rights to please that wretch Aleck? It’s just what he wants for me to marry you and leave everything to him; and, do you know, I’ve a good mind to take him at his word just out of spite. That’s the worst I could do to him.’

‘Whist, whist!’ Willie interrupted her with, ‘You’re jokin’, lass, but I dinna like it. Say anything but that. You would never leave me for a bit dirty gold.’

‘Would I not?’ queried Kitty, who was an incorrigible tease. ‘You’ll maybe see me make a runaway match of it; aye, and glad you would be after awhile to get quit of me; but here’s the door. If I’m not away I’ll maybe be in the wood on Sunday night,’ and she was off, leaving Willie to go home so thoughtful that he quite forgot to feed his tame fox until wakened in the night by its yelping, a thing that had never happened in his life before.

Business was very dull in the Red Lion next afternoon, and Adam retired to his attic room, where Kitty had a cheerful fire, before which she sat knitting. Meg, the celebrated black-and-white greyhound, of which Adam was very proud, stretched its aristocratic body out on the rug, while beside it reclined a very different-looking dog. Its rough, short, curly hair was that of a terrier, but its long face and limbs and slender contour demonstrated its relation to the breed of which Meg was a pure and beautiful specimen. Jack, as he was called, was the very mongrel for a poacher.

Adam's conversation did not relate to his hounds, however, but to his son. He spoke about Willie Allan with a moderation and impressiveness his niece had not expected to find.

'Bairn,' he said, 'ye'll rue a lifetime if ye marry a man like that. It might be fine for a twelvemonth, but after that he'll get worse than ever, and the work and anxiety'll all fall on you. Better take a man like Aleck, that you can depend on to keep you comfortable, than one like Allan, that'll expect you to take care o' him.'

'Ah,' replied Kitty, 'had Aleck been the man his father is, I would never have looked to another; but I cannot trust him.'

'That's where you're wrong, lass. Sandy's a well-bred lad both on the mother's side and the father's. There's not a better bred lad in Blackford, and blood

is sure to tell. He may be quiet, but he's game, I warrant you. I could trust him with all I have.'

'You'd better not, uncle; and as to breeding, do you mind Meg's last pups that you expected to be so good and still had to drown, for, says you, she's bred back? Well, I think Sandy's been bred back, and that's why I want nothing to do with him.'

'No, no, Kitty. If Aleck was what you say I would have kicked him to the door sooner than let him marry you. But he's a true lad for all his backwardness, and has a strong notion for you—a strong notion for him,' Adam repeated.

'But if Aleck was a bad, treacherous man, and didn't care a bit for me, would you leave me free to take anybody I like?' queried Kitty.

'Sartainly, sartainly,' answered her uncle.

'Well, if I thought his blood as good as his breeding I would take him to-morrow,' began Kitty; but she stopped, for Adam was not listening. Something had caught his eye outside, and a stranger to his habits might have thought him rapt in contemplation of the winter sunset's reddened clouds or the snowy landscape. The window commanded a view of a forty-acre field which stretched away from the village gardens to a great thick wood, from which it was separated by a brook. In the very middle of it stood a solitary tree, the boughs of which shone like dark tracery in the evening light. 'Look

yonder,' said Adam, pointing to the foot of this tree. A timid, limping, hungry hare, probably tempted by the remembrance of the vegetables it had sometimes on moonlight nights found in the gardens, was making towards them in little starts and runs followed by stops, during which it would sit with its long ears pricked up to listen to or scent danger. Could any Blackford man look on that sight unmoved? It might have made the old minister himself turn poacher, and the temptation was quite too strong for Adam. The very dogs, by the eager way in which they started up to follow him, seemed to see a chance of sport in his looks.

He was no sooner gone than Kitty did a very curious thing. Running to her own apartment, she quickly produced a biggish bunch of old keys, and began trying the lock of Adam's chest until she got one to fit. Then she opened it and looked in. But no pile of gold met her eye. Adam had a second box within the big one, and it, too, was locked. Kitty did not seem at all disappointed. Without touching anything in the box, she let the lid fall, carefully locked it and put her keys back where she had found them.

Had Willie Allan been there to watch her next proceedings, he would have been hurt and surprised; for the little flirt, after smartening herself up before the mirror, proceeded to the kitchen, where Aleck was busy polishing the harness of the doctor's horse, which happened to be kept at the Red Lion. Ensconcing

herself snugly in the arm-chair in the corner, she plainly said, by look and movement, 'Come, woo me.' Though Aleck was in the mood to respond, he possessed none of that spirit of gallantry which ought to have made him quick to take the hint. Kitty's eyes were beginning to twinkle with amusement at her and his own embarrassment, when luckily Adam looked in with the hare, but he forgot all about Jack's performance in his pleasure at seeing the cousins so friendly.

'Ah!' he cried, 'but you are two sly ones—courtin' like that whenever the old man's back is turned,' and in great glee he went away and left them.

'What do you think of that, now?' said Kitty, laughing.

'I wish it was true,' said Aleck.

'That is because you're a fool,' said Kitty. 'What on earth should we be sweetheartin' for? What kind o' life would you live here if you were married, Sandy? As long as Adam Black's here—and that may be twenty years yet—Adam Black will be master. And as for you, you'll toil and moil and mourn till the grey hairs come, and you'll get his money when you're past enjoying it. That's the look-out for a woman with a notion of you, my lad.'

'I'll not deny you've hit it, Kitty. It's a poor spec at the best, keeping a country public; the hinds haven't the money to spend. If I had father's savings now, I wouldn't bide here past the term. I'd get a place nearer the pits; them's the lads to spend!'

‘If I were a man like you, Aleck, do you know what I’d do? I would make a big try to get these same savings and bolt; if you were quick and clever enough they’d never catch you, and you could change your name and get a new start.’

‘Ah, I’ve thought o’ that, but the old one’s overcunnin’. I believe he wears the key of the big chest always round his neck.’

‘If that’s all your trouble, I know where to get a key. But would you not be frightened, Aleck? Folk might call it robbery.’

‘That wouldn’t be true. The money is mine as much as his, for I’ve worked hardest for it, and there’s a lot of it yours, Kitty, and he wouldn’t make much noise about it. He wouldn’t disgrace the name by making it a by-word, and he liked you so much that he wouldn’t seek to get you into bad trouble. There would be murder, though, if he got hold of us himself.’

That was the way in which the elopement was planned. During the next few days the cousins were in almost constant conversation, and even shrewd Adam was deceived, and thought, poor man, that his niece had given up Willie Allan, not from any mercenary motives, but because of the weighty advice he had given her. Never had he felt more serenely happy than on the next Sunday afternoon. The hare had been cooked exactly to his liking—the fore part in soup, the back part in a pie—and after a dinner that might have pleased an emperor, followed by a

taste of his fine old brandy—brandy kept for the exclusive use of the fox-hunting squires who would sometimes lunch at the Red Lion when their meet was in the neighbourhood—he sallied forth for his usual Sunday afternoon walk, pipe in mouth and Jack and Meg at his heels.

‘If you want a bit sport,’ said Kitty to him, aside, as he was going out, ‘take a turn in the forty-acre about dusk.’ He had no chance of asking her meaning, for there were others about, but he said to himself, ‘Ah, she’s a sharp one, is Kit. That means another good dinner or I’m cheated,’ and went his way.

No sooner was he gone than a tremendous bustle began in the public-house, although it was shut on Sundays. Aleck did not know what to take and what to leave.

‘It’s four weary miles we have to walk into Scotland,’ said Kitty, ‘so the less we have to carry the better, Aleck—that box ’ll be a weight to take in itself, lad.’

‘We’ll have plenty of time, though. Bet can say we’ve gone for a walk, and he’ll be as pleased as Punch. Have you opened the chest?’

‘Yes,’ said Kitty, ‘it’s all right. The only pity is I could not open the little box, and you’ll have to take it with us.’

Darkness was just falling when the two fugitives emerged from the Red Lion. The peaceful villagers

were all within doors, for it was bitterly cold and the sharp north wind had begun to drive stray flakes of snow in front of it. Which way should they take? There could be no doubt of that : down the hill by the foot-road, across the brook by the single-plank bridge, through the wood until the highway was reached, and then a bold push to get across the Border. Many a Northumbrian lad and lass in the old time had trudged to the altar in that style, but few of the gallants carried a treasure with them such as was under Aleck's arm. Many a sharp look they cast on all sides lest there should be any suspicious witness of their flight, but not a soul did they see, and the friendly snow dropped softly on their treacherous footprints. Not a word did either say till they reached the old willow near which the brook was crossed by a trembling plank. Then Kitty grew nervous.

'I'm frightened to cross the burn,' she said ; 'go you first.'

'Be quick, then,' he answered, 'and I'll hold it ;' and getting swiftly to the other side he seized the end of the unsteady bit of wood. But instead of following at once, Kitty screamed, 'Here is Jack, your father must be chasing us.' Aleck stood undecided a moment, then dashed the frail bridge into the water. 'Hide where you can,' he shouted ; 'he can't jump the burn, and I'll make off with the money.'

'Oh, he'll kill me !' pleaded the girl. 'Don't run away from me, Aleck !'

‘You shouldn’t have been so slow,’ he retorted, with the box already under his arm.

‘Stop, you blackguardly thief; stop, I say,’ hoarsely shouted his father, running up from where he had been looking after some rabbits. But the son turned in terror and fled. Not far, however, for a new-comer appeared on the scene. Willie Allan, true to his appointment with Kitty, though he hardly expected to see her, emerged from the wood.

‘Holloa,’ he said, placing himself in front of the runaway. ‘What’s up?’

‘Fell him dead!’ yelled Adam.

‘Let him go,’ said Kitty, but so softly that her lover could not make out what she said.

‘You’d better turn back,’ he said to Aleck; but the fugitive, brought to bay, was desperate.

‘Let me be,’ he said, ‘or by —— I’ll stab you,’ drawing a clasp-knife from his pocket.

‘You scoundrel!’ cried the other in a white heat, ‘would you commit murder?’

Willie was credited with possessing more ‘science’ than any other man in Blackford, and where will you find good boxing if not in North Northumberland? He made a feint, and the vengeful blade glittered in a momentary streak of moonlight, but to no purpose, for a side-leap carried its object out of reach, and Willie landed a left-hander like a horse’s kick just above the right eye of his opponent, who fell all his length on the snow and in a trice was divested of his knife,

which Willie threw contemptuously into the brook. 'Get up and fight like a man,' he said ; but Aleck was beaten. Adam was in ecstasies.

'Bring the box round, lad ; never mind that villain.' Willie lifted it, but on feeling the weight—'No, no,' he replied, 'he can take it back himself. Take it up and wade,' he said, 'and if you drop it or try any tricks I'll bray your head into putty.'

'Let me carry it round by the big bridge?' besought the now thoroughly cowed Sandy.

'No, by Heaven!' said the other, 'through the burn you go ;' and, willing or not, he forced him to ford the current which a moment after he cleared in a running leap.

'What is it all about?' he then found time to ask.

'You've stopped a bit ugly work, I'm thinking,' said Adam, upon whom the full extent of the crime began to dawn as he dimly recognised the shape, size, and weight of his money-box in the clouded, uncertain light. 'These two have been trying to rob me.'

'Never,' said Willie. 'Kitty, you wouldn't do *that*?'

'Come up and make sure,' said Adam.

With that they all began silently to retrace their steps, only Kitty slipped away in front as if to avoid embarrassing questions. Willie was very thoughtful. Just as they were coming to the door he said to Adam, in a low, troubled voice, which he tried hard to make

indifferent, 'Look here, Adam ; you haven't lost anything by this row, and there isn't much use in exposing her, is there ?'

'No,' was the reply, 'but since they're so fond I'll make them marry and set up house by themselves.' With that they entered the kitchen, where Aleck, all shivering with his bath, deposited the box on the floor. A cheerful firelight showed Kitty, not as might have been expected, with abashed countenance and the demeanour of a culprit awaiting justice, but with heightened colour and sparkling eyes, far bonnier than ever, as her old lover could not help thinking.

'There's your true blood,' she said to Adam, but pointing to his son, 'and this has been a fine night's work for him. It began with robbing you that's done so much for him, then the sweetheart that liked him so well as to run away with him he left on the wrong side o' the burn, and then to draw his knife on an honest man ! You'll never seek to make me wed him now !'

'That you shall, you shameless hussy,' broke out her uncle. 'You're not fit for Allan—and I'm sure, from what I've seen this night, he wouldn't look at a thief.'

'No, I couldn't do that,' said Willie, 'but there's no need for me here,' and he was about to leave when he was stopped by a burst of mischievous laughter.

'It's Bet's box,' she said. 'Bet's box !' said Aleck,

and 'Bet's box,' echoed Adam and Willie. 'Aye, Bet's box,' said Kitty.

'Sure enough it's not my box,' said the uncle, dragging it into the light. 'It's the same size, but not the colour, but whatever is making it so heavy?'

That was soon discovered. The red-headed servant girl came forward with a smile on her gaping mouth that suggested the part she had taken in the trick. 'There's a stone of shot,' she said, 'and there's the horse-shoes from the back yard, and there's the rusty keys that used to lie in the stable, and there's my old petticoats stuffed in to keep them from jingling, and,' she added, 'the weights and the flat-iron.'

'By George!' said Willie, 'he must have meant to start a pack. Would you have stabbed me to save that dirt?'

'He didn't know what it was,' answered for him Kitty. 'I just wanted to try his mettle, so I put this box in the room of the other one and it's back in its place now, neither touched nor opened.'

'I'm glad of that, lass,' said the old publican; and though there was not much in the words there was a something in the voice that made them sink deep; 'it would have been a bad day for me when I found you turning against me; but Willie, lad, if you want to catch this skittish filly you'd better be quick. Down to the minister's you go to-morrow and get your names asked; and as for you, you lubberly simple,

after making a fool of yourself like that what's to come of you ?'

'Marry him to Bet,' suggested Kitty.

'The very ticket !' returned her uncle. 'Will you have him, Bet ?'

'Aye, that will I,' said the laconic maid.

'You'll go down to the minister's as well, then,' said Adam to Aleck ; 'and now, lass, bring us a drop o' that brandy, and put the kettle on and bring the sugar, and we'll christen the bargain.'

So a few weeks afterwards there were two weddings in Blackford, and when the lads of the village 'roped' Willie Allan he gave them a whole half-sovereign to drink, and was therefore allowed to enter the croft-house with a thunderstorm of cheers ; but when they did the same thing to Aleck he morosely cut the rope with a knife, and that is why he has been so unlucky ever since ; for if you go to Blackford now you will find the croft-house to be the neatest, prettiest, nicest house there, while ever since old Adam's death the Red Lion has been so squalid and dirty and disreputable that the Marquis has serious thoughts of taking away the license and turning it into a butcher's shop.

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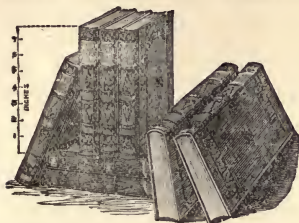
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